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A YEAR MORE OR LESS

by

C. E. M. JOAD

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NOTE

MY THANKS ARE DUE to the *Countrygoer* for permission to reprint the entry under April 20th, "Two Days in Galloway," which originally appeared as an article in the *Countrygoer*, and to the *New Statesman* for permission to reprint the entry under October 17th, 1947, part of which appeared as an article in the *New Statesman*.

C. E. M. JOAD

November, 1947.

A YEAR MORE OR LESS

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A YEAR MORE OR LESS

August 12th, 1946

COVERACK: ON NOT CATCHING FISH. THE VIRTUES OF
SANDY P.

On not catching Fish

WENT OUT FISHING in the evening with Sandy P. who owns a motor boat. Coverack is said to be a great place for mackerel, pollock and bass; occasionally there is a shoal of pilchard, though not so often as there used to be. But this was a bad year, or month, or week—I forget which. (In my experience it always is. There is, that is to say, always *some* reason why fish are not being caught; it is too fine, or too dry, or too wet, or too hot, or too cold, or too windy, or too still, or it is an unprecedentedly bad year or month or week.) Whatever the reason, having been regaled beforehand with stories of catches regularly averaging from a dozen to twenty mackerel, on this occasion we caught one. There is no skill in this sort of fishing; you trail a line over the side of the boat with a spinner at the end and wait for one of the captious brutes to see and seize it. Any fool, it is obvious, could do that; besides, when I made enquiries afterwards, I couldn't find that any of the experts had done much better than we did.

There was a stiff breeze, the boat rocked and before long I began to feel cold and low. Even if I am not actively sick or am not feeling sick or am not afraid of feeling sick—and on this occasion I was afraid only—to spend any length of time in a boat bores and depresses me. I suppose that if you are on a yacht and are managing or helping to manage the thing, the experience can be exciting enough. But for the mere passenger yachting is one of the most shameful impostures that man's credulity has ever misbegotten upon his innocence. You sit there in the bows, bored and useless; from time to time you are drenched with spray; you cannot read or talk or go to sleep for fear lest a long pole—the boom, I think—should come swinging across and sweep you

into the sea. This ever-present possibility keeps you on the alert besides causing you continually to change your position in order to avoid the thing. When you want to come back to land, which in my case you do almost at once, there is either a contrary wind or no wind at all. You tack to and fro, approaching the shore with exasperating slowness and it is always on the cards that when you do at last reach land, the place landed at will turn out not to be the place you set sail from, but some other place. Again and again, before I at last learnt wisdom, I have accepted invitations from the owners of yachts—invitations extended by men who believed themselves to be conferring a benison—to go for “a short trip,” and again and again before a third of the trip was over I have pained them and humiliated myself by retiring from the cold, wet spaces of the deck to some stuffy, little dark hole of a cabin, there to read miserably with as much patience as I could muster until the business was over.

A motor boat is not as bad as a yacht, (*a*) because there is no boom, (*b*) because if you hire it, you can come in whenever you like, (*c*) because when you do want to come in, you come in straight without any nonsense about tacking, and (*d*) because when you have got in, you can go straight home instead of having to mess about putting things away.

Nevertheless it is bad enough. I stuck it for as long as I could and then asked to return. We had intended to maintain our endeavours to catch fish for two hours; in point of fact, we came in after one hour and a quarter, which seemed like three. Rarely have I known time to pass so slowly. In normal circumstances I am a rather good subconscious measurer of time; in normal circumstances, that is to say, when I am on land and not at the dentist's, I can guess pretty accurately how long something has lasted and tell almost to a minute what the time is. But these circumstances were not normal, and over and over again I looked at my watch

and found to my astonishment that a period which I had estimated at a quarter of an hour had, in fact, endured for a few minutes. Presently I began to expect the time to go slower than I thought it did; yet, in spite of this expectation, I continued to feel astonishment every time I looked at my watch. I made a note to put fishing at the head of my lecturing illustrations of the subjectivity of time. Hitherto my stock example of time appearing to go very slowly has been that of the man in the dentist's chair, or presumably—I say presumably, since none of us has after all been there—the man on the rack. Now I shall substitute time spent in a boat fishing. (Incidentally, I am always gruelled by the difficulty of finding examples of time going fast. One wants, it is obvious, an example of ecstatic delight. The obvious case is, I suppose, the pleasure of sexual intercourse, but one cannot cite that in a large mixed class. Besides, does time go so very much faster than usual when we are enjoying the physical pleasures of love? Surely this is a timeless experience!)

The “pleasure” of fishing in a motor boat is one degree worse than the “pleasure” of land motoring, in that one feels actually ill while “the pleasure” is being “enjoyed”; it has, however, this advantage over motoring that, when at last it is over and one steps out on to the land, one is suffused with a vast and complex joy, the joy of security, the joy of homecoming, the joy of moving one's limbs and getting warm again, the joy of seeing and feeling a familiar solidity. Now one of the worst things about motoring is that it makes one incapable of savouring the pleasure of ceasing to motor. One sits in the car hour after hour, all liver and no legs, dazed, brutish, miserable and low; presently one sinks into a coma whose chief characteristic is that it disables one from being or doing or from wishing to be or wishing to do anything other than what one is already being and doing. One is not happy; yet one dreads the end of the journey because one has neither the energy nor the

initiative to get up, disentangle oneself, cope with the luggage and meet people, to resume, in fact, the business of being a human being.

The Virtues of Sandy P.

In a fishing boat, too, one can think after a fashion. I relieved my boredom by thinking about Sandy P. He was the authentic picture of the "old salt," featuring red, weatherbeaten cheeks, kind, very blue eyes, strong chin, bad teeth, prominent Adam's apple, and grizzled hair. The chief impression one derived from him was that of kindness; he did not say much, but what he said was pleasant, agreeable and to the point. Goodness emanated from him like an atmosphere. Here, you felt, was a man devoid of envy, spite and malice, content with his lot, nourishing no ambitions above his station, liking his fellows and being liked by them, a man of his word, a man you could trust; above all, a man devoid of most of the misery-making emotions. Fishermen, like gardeners, often strike one as being nicer than most people, partly because they strike one as being more contented. If you are contented, it is comparatively easy to be good and Sandy P.'s life, which consisted of trips in his boat to look at his lobster pots, trips in his boat to catch mackerel, varied by trips in the life-boat to save persons, seemed to offer few opportunities for sin. Even in the evenings, I thought, life is easier for him than it is for most of us, precisely because his life is more of a piece than is the life of most of us. There is no cinema to go to and there is no dance-hall; and, even if there were, there are no accessible women to go with.

In the evening Sandy P. hangs about on the jetty, talking to other fishermen and mending his nets, smokes his pipe and has a pint of beer, never more, in the pub. Morally, you would say, an easy life; at least, a life in which it is easy to be decent, provided that you can be content with it; easier, at any rate, I thought, than most

lives and certainly easier than my own. (Yet perhaps it is a universal illusion that other people's lives are easier than our lives.)

For we must, I think, accept the fact that some lives are harder to live well than others. It is easier, for example, to be a virtuous clerk than a virtuous emperor, if only because the temptations which beset the clerk are fewer than those to which his possession of absolute power exposes the emperor, the temptations of gross sensuality for example, of sloth, of cruelty, above all the temptation to the misuse of power, from all of which the clerk is comparatively immune. Who, indeed, among us could truthfully declare that, if he possessed Gyges's ring of invisibility and so could escape the consequences of his actions by disappearing at will, he would acknowledge as many restraints upon the gratification of his desires as he does in his capacity as a permanently visible member of a civilised society. Conversely, it is hard to believe that the starving wretch who steals to feed his family, or the inmate of the concentration camp, reduced by torture and fear to a mere wreck of twittering nerves and shrinking flesh, finds it as easy to practice the virtues of honesty and courage as the average citizen. Physical torture, provided it be sufficiently gross and sufficiently prolonged, degrades a man until he is something less than human.

Granted, then, that some lives offer less temptations to vice and greater facilities for decent virtue than others, that of Sandy P. must, I think, be ranked high up towards the easy end of the moral scale. Goodness, as I have observed, radiated from his face. But, then, "What is there," I asked myself, "in his life to make him bad. He is not rushed and harried as I am; hence his life holds fewer occasions for irritability and bad temper. He is not ambitious as I am; therefore he is less prone to wounded vanity, envy and spite. He does not possess or desire wealth; therefore he is comparatively immune from the vices of cupidity, ostentation

and vulgarity. On the other hand, he has enough to emancipate him from the narrowing cares of the very poor. Women are not to him a provocation, nor is he beset by the complex temptation to which I am more or less continually exposed to permit his talents to be prostituted for heavy gain into doing work which is easy or humiliating. For he has no talents in the sense in which I am using the word, and there is only one kind of work that he can do. He has no occasion to be unscrupulous, using people, as I do, not as ends in themselves, but as means to the fulfilment of my ends; indeed, he has no occasion to use anybody at all." How much easier, in short, to be a good man if your life and circumstances are those of Sandy P. than if they are mine. Fishermen, no doubt, *have* their temptations, and there are "bad hats" in every walk of life. Nevertheless, I concluded, it is easier for a man placed as Sandy P. is to attain a high level of virtue than it is for me.

I comforted myself by hoping that less in the way of moral achievement will be expected of me, precisely because my moral conflicts are more numerous and my moral temptations more severe, just as fewer runs are expected of the man who has to go in to bat on a sticky drying wicket than from one who goes in on a plumb dry one.

I hope rather than believe that this is sound theology and good ethics. For what it in effect amounts to is the suggestion that the degree in which a man is educated and his life is varied, his position prominent, his tastes civilised and his interests versatile, is also the degree in which his character will be morally undesirable; or, if that be putting it too hardly, is also the degree in which it will be more difficult for him to achieve and to maintain a character that is morally desirable. That sounds all wrong to me, so I suppose that what I have said is neither sound theology nor good ethics. But even so the question remains, why are so many good chaps circumstanced like Sandy P.?

August 15th, 1946

COVERACK: EARLY MORNING MOOD. THE TRUE DIVISION
OF ENGLAND. WEATHERS IN DIFFERENT AGES

Early Morning Mood

THIS HAS BEEN an agreeable week at Coverack, a week of varying weather, of sunlight and showers, the last week, as it turned out, before the rains came to ruin the rest of the summer. I notice with some surprise that although I am in the far West Country I wake up feeling well and vigorous. I have been getting up at about eight and have gone into the garden to look at the sea before breakfast. My mind has been clear, my emotions quiet. No letters or newspapers have as yet arrived to let in the world and there is nothing to disturb my perception of the beauty of the scene. Yet beautiful as it is, the perception carries little emotion, for all the dogs of emotion are as yet, thank goodness, asleep. This, I have always maintained, is the mood and the time to listen to Bach, with all one's faculties at cutting edge and the mirror of sensibility untarnished by feeling. Wagner at such a moment would sound intolerably lush, the moderns thin and desiccated. But this early-morning mood is pre-eminently the mood for Bach, who demands nothing from his hearers in the way of emotion except what is felt for the music itself. However, this is Coverack, and there is no Bach. In his absence, I revel in the clarity of my own mind. The chapter on St. Thomas Aquinas in Russell's about-to-be published *A History of Western Philosophy*, which I had been reading the preceding night and which had then engendered a vague feeling of disquietude—could St. Thomas, I wondered, really be so trivial as Russell seemed to make him?—now gives me no trouble. It is

almost certain, I thought, that Russell, with his anti-Catholic bias, has made St. Thomas seem more foolish than he was, dwelling in malicious glee on those aspects of St. Thomas's thought which seem to us most absurd—as, for example, the speculations about what happens to the bodies of hereditary cannibals at the Resurrection, or the argument against brother-sister incest on the ground that, if family love were added to sexual, they would have intercourse too often and enjoy it too much.

But this morning I don't much mind, anyway. After all, who is St. Thomas that I should allow myself to be bothered by him? My own writing awaits me and in this early-morning mood it seems both easy and attractive. Moreover, I have the energy to tackle it. Ideas come and they are fertile ideas, engendering others that bud from them like branches from a tree. What is more, I know how to arrange and to present them to the best advantage. In fact, I know exactly what I am going to write. I feel energy rising in me like a spring. . . . By eleven I know the mood will have passed and things will no longer seem easier than they are and my mind brighter than it is. It is odd, I reflected, that here in the depths of Cornwall one should on waking feel so fresh and clear, so exaltedly above oneself, so *au dessus de la mêlée* of one's own passions and emotions, as if, for once, Plato's first part of the soul, the reasoning part, really were on top.

But was it, after all, surprising considering how well one had slept? Here in Coverack one fell asleep without fear, dreamt without alarm and woke without difficulty. Now, I have found in general that the places in which one sleeps heavily are also places in which one feels heavy on waking. Sometimes one misses it both ways, waking heavy without sleeping heavily. At Midhurst, for example, my powers of sleeping are not out of the common; I don't regard sleep as a positive thing and look forward to it as a positively pleasant thing as I do here, yet I wake feeling as if my wits were swathed in a

fleece of cotton wool; the body is slack, the mind clogged. Much as I love the place, candour compels me to avow that there is a feeling of the Turkish bath about Midhurst in the early morning. Nothing is clear, sharp or well defined; least of all, one's own clouded wits. With what heaviness of spirit one begins to work; how one nods over one's writing; what half-hours one steals off for mental mooning, surreptitious novel-reading or unabashed sleeping. At Cwm Carvan in Monmouthshire, where I used to stay regularly until K. S. died, one slept quite as heavily as at Coverack, and awakened to a heaviness comparable to that of Midhurst. In the New Forest, the heaviest place I know—but wonderful for love-making—one sleeps like a log and wakes like a brute, remaining brutish for the best part of the morning. In East Anglia, however tired you may be, it is exceedingly difficult to go to sleep at all. Yet I do not remember that my wits have been particularly bright on the Essex-Suffolk border, though I do remember wondering how the population replenished itself, so erotically austere, so sexually disinterested did I feel. I have felt the same wonder on the East Yorkshire coast. At Mapledurham in the Thames Valley, where it is almost impossible to remain awake after 10.30 at night and where it is a "head-achey" and not an agreeable tiredness that sets one nodding in one's chair, one wakes up reasonably bright, cheerful and early. In south-western Surrey and throughout most of Sussex one feels sleepy in the evening of the day one arrives from London, but becomes acclimatised fairly quickly. On the other hand, at Brighton one feels better than anywhere else in the country.

I find these variations between different parts of England in respect of such matters as quick and easy sleep, early waking, degrees of heaviness and brightness, severity of desire felt for the other sex, brutishness and head-achiness at night and so on fascinating. Not enough attention has, I think, been paid to them.

The True Division of England

People are, of course, always dividing England. There is the twofold division between town and country, and the fourfold division between the England of the old pre-industrial towns, the England that was brought into being by the Industrial Revolution, the England of the twentieth century, the spreading suburbs, the arterial roads and the new factories, and the England which is still country. In the country itself there is the division between mountain and plain, between fertile lands and barren, between forest land and rough grazing. There are historic divisions between parts of England that were civilised by the Romans and the uncivilised parts the Romans never reached, and there is the more recent division between the England which is peopled by the descendants of the Industrial Revolution—stocky, restless, cinema-going, cigarette-consuming, radio-listening, greyhound-watching, football-pool-following, town-dwellers—and the diminishing England of the stolid, phlegmatic, traditional John Bull. There are geological divisions. . . .

For my part, however, I think that the true division of England is one of climate, and by division by climate I don't just mean that some parts are wetter, some drier, some colder, some hotter, some windier, some calmer; I mean something subtler, namely, the effects of the different climates of England upon myself and presumably, therefore, upon most of those who are more or less continuously exposed to them. I mean, in fact, what all of us who live in London know, that we have only to leave Paddington or Waterloo of a Saturday afternoon and arrive in the evening in Surrey or Sussex or Wiltshire or Dorset or Devon or Cornwall (above all, in Devon or Cornwall) to find ourselves different persons, lazier, sleepier, stupider, but also kindlier and more serene. We feel sleepy about ten o'clock and want to go to bed a good hour earlier than we do in London. Also on both sides of sleep we pass through delicious periods between

sleeping and waking, when who shall tell where the one begins and the other ends, as we float upon a sea of dreams which merge into daydreams, or lie contented over the morning cup of tea, lazily liquidating the lees of sleep and the languors of love; whereas in London sleep is cut off sharp by a knife and, when we wake, we wake at once, all hard and sharp and brittle with no possibility of being anything but our ordinary conscious selves. I mean, in short, that consciousness in the West has overtones and undertones, whereas in London (and this, I think, is true of most of East Anglia and the East Riding) consciousness is just itself and nothing more.

For me, then, the significant division of England is between the England that braces and the England that relaxes. Suppose that we draw a diagonal line across England from Newcastle to Portsmouth. To the east is the England that braces. It stands in the intellectual sphere for theological exegesis and speculation, for moral controversy, mathematics and metaphysical poetry; in the political, for Roundheadism, radicalism, reformism and sturdy individualism; in the æsthetic, for clear, pale blue skies—the sky here is often the main feature; it is lit with a bright, gay light and pretty well all the great landscape pictures that have come out of England, from Constable to Cotman and Turner to Crome, are from the east of the line. In the matter of the body, this half of England produces dry skins, bright eyes, great draughts of physical energy, constipation and low sexual temperature. The people are common-sensical, realistic and matter of fact; they stand no nonsense and, in particular, no snobbish nonsense about kings, priests, nobles and “Society” with a big S.

*“When Adam delved and Eve span
Who was then a gentleman?”—*

the question would not have occurred to an Englishman living west of the line.

Metaphysically, the easterners tend to the view—in

spite of the metaphysical poetry—that there is only one order of reality, the natural order, and as a matter of common prudence they hold that we had better make the best and the most of it and not go a-whoring after intellectual will-o'-the-wisps. It will be seen that Cambridge falls very clearly on the eastern side of the line.

On the west is mysticism. The world is not all of a piece nor is there only one level of reality; what is more, unseen things lie near the surface of the familiar world. Here are pomp, pageantry and colour, a care for externals and a feeling for the hierarchy of rank. It is no accident, by the way, that the Oxford Movement and its contemporary progeny, the Anglo-Catholics, should have come from the west. In spite of the eastern superiority in painting, there is in the west a more generally diffused feeling for beauty, especially for natural beauty—our Nature poetry, though, comes pretty equally from both sides of the line—above all, for music. West of the line there are laziness, day-dreaming, brooding and mooning, the sexual temperature is high and the passions are disposed to sultriness—at least, they are as sultry as they ever manage to be among the English. *Accidie*, the noonday demon, which attacks us about three o'clock in the afternoon, especially after a good lunch, and takes all the colour and savour out of things, whispering into our ears that nothing is worth trying or doing or saying or thinking—*accidie* lurks mainly on the west of the line. The only ways of dealing with the demon are to take exercise or go to sleep; this has long been known at Oxford.

Here are softness of scene and of water producing a quick and abundant lather and a general relaxation and loosening of the fibres. The bowels open easily and abundantly. Nothing is taut, trim, sharp, flat and obvious, but there are overtones and undertones, half lights and hidden depths. Here are Anglicanism, port-lovers, woman-haters, royalists and Jacobites.

The colours of the eastern half of England are light, light blues, light browns and greens. (One thinks of the light brown of the carriages and the light green of the engines of the old Great Northern and Great Eastern railways.) In the western half, the characteristic colours are darker, purples and yellows and deep, velvety browns.

Such is my map of England. The thing that cuts chiefly across it is the ghost. Almost all the ghosts of England come from the eastern counties. I have counted the selected ghost stories in the two volumes in *The World's Classics*; at least three-quarters of the English ones deal with the eastern counties and so do nearly all M. R. James's *Ghost Stories of An Antiquary*. These multitudinous eastern ghosts are bred, I suppose, of the fogs and the fens. They lurk along the muddy estuaries of Suffolk and Essex, where the land falls away despondently into the sea. Still, this eastern prevalence of ghosts is puzzling.

Weathers in Different Ages

So far I have been thinking of the English climate in terms of places. One could analyse it, if one had the knowledge with equal significance in terms of ages, noting how in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries it is apparently mainly fine—the eighteenth, in particular, is full of sunlight—while in the nineteenth it is characteristically wet, cold and blustering; for example, there was usually a fog in Baker Street. (*Vide passim* that admirable passage in Virginia Woolf's *Orlando* describing the coming of the nineteenth century in terms of cloud and damp, evergreens, ivies and rhododendrons.)

In the twentieth century the climate began by being wet and then about 1930 became predominantly fine. In the last few years it has changed in the direction of greater severity. I do not mean that it is wetter, or drier, or colder, or hotter so much as that, whichever it happens to be, whether wet or dry or cold or hot, it is so for a

longer time and is more intensely so. The rains are heavier and the rainy spells longer; there are more droughts and cold spells and in particular cold east wind spells are more severe—or is it that I am getting older and begin to feel the cold? Who can forget those early winters of the war? Our climate, in short, is changing in the direction of less variability and greater intensity. Then there are the climates appropriate to authors. In the eighteenth-century authors, in Fielding or in Smollett, the sun shines and it is usually summer. In Jane Austen rain is an event; it is mainly fine, though often cold. In Dickens, as befits the nineteenth century, it is almost always raining or blowing and the inclement elements lead the starving wretch to picture to himself the more vividly and the more hopelessly the cosy room with the easy chairs, the drawn curtains and the firelight reflected on the shining brass and polished wood. In Meredith the sun shines again, but in Hardy's poems the rain drips and falls. The typical Hardy season is autumn and the typical Hardy weather autumnal, windless and still. As likely as not there is a mist and Nature seems to hold her breath in suspense as if she, too, were waiting for the coming of those dreadful events with which Hardy delights his readers. One thinks of that afternoon in *Far from the Madding Crowd* on which Joseph Poorgrass drives the cart with the coffin containing Fanny Robins from Casterbridge to Weatherbury. The sea mist comes up; Poorgrass goes into a pub, meets Coggan and Clarke and they drink themselves silly. As a result, the body arrives at Weatherbury too late for burial that night and Bathsheba finds it, from which point onwards the fat is very much in the fire.

Just such a mist is sweeping over Coverack as I write. It has been thick on Goonhilly Down at the back of us since early morning; now it is creeping down on to the coastal strip and blowing out to sea. It has begun to rain. I shall go and bathe not because I like bathing in the rain—in fact, my warm, soft body shrinks from the

impact of the slimy rocks and the stinging drops- but because I shall enjoy having done it and bask in the complacency of the reflection that no other person in Coverack, perhaps in Cornwall, will be bathing this afternoon.

August 18th, 1946

JOURNEY FROM BATH TO BERKSHIRE

MET B. AT BATH and motored to his house in Berkshire. The journey cut through several strata of English life and history. So outstanding were the contrasts that I think I should have noticed some of them for myself; but with B. to give them point and emphasis in that charming drawl of his, that passes so quickly from derision to tenderness that sometimes you don't know which of the two, tender or derisive, he is being and you look at him to make sure only to find out that he isn't quite sure either, until, catching your enquiring eye, he laughs outright at your embarrassment and his uncertainty and the moment ends in derision after all—so sharp was their impact upon my consciousness that now, two days later, I can still vividly recall them.

First, the architectural contrast! Here was Bath, by any reckoning, I suppose, the loveliest city in the country, fortunate in its possession of a local authority that knows its value and, whether out of sheer love for it or from a realisation of its value as an infinitely exploitable, long-term, commercial asset, does its best to preserve it.

B. took me to Landsdowne Crescent, which I had seen only once before, insisting that it was better than Royal Crescent immediately below. He also showed me Camden, previously unknown to me and though not in the same class as the more famous Crescents, yet very lovely. Whether it is the colour of the stone, the arrangement of the buildings, the rightness of proportion and shape and, more particularly, the rightness of the proportions and shape of the windows—what, by the way, is the secret of the difference between an eighteenth-century window, broken up into its separate panes and a

nineteenth- or twentieth-century window, a difference so marked that, whereas the former is a source of pleasure ever renewed, the latter, once looked at, is never remembered? I don't know. What I do know is that so great is one pleasure in the former that one might have thought that our architects, not apparently being able to create any pleasure-producing buildings of their own, would make a point of measuring their proportions with a view to exactly reproducing them. But they don't; too proud, I suppose!—whether it is any one or, as is more probable, all of these things taken together, I don't know, yet such is the agreeableness of the Bath crescents that I would give all the cathedrals I have seen on the Continent, with the possible exception of Chartres, if only I might be assured of seeing the crescents again. I would say the same of the Cotswold villages.

For some miles out of Bath on the London road these lovely buildings persisted, though much obscured by traffic and defaced by plates, plaques, posters, boards and advertisements. And for many miles the buildings were still of Bath stone. There were, for example, Corsham, a superbly beautiful house seen through a vista formed by a long avenue of trees, and the arch of Box Tunnel, designed, I was told, by Brunel, the most shapely—in fact, the only shapely tunnel entrance I know.

Next, our own age appropriately represented by Corsham Dump, I think the largest, certainly the ugliest agglomeration of twentieth-century refuse that I have seen. For a mile or more on the left-hand side of the road ran a chain of tall iron posts, curving inwards at the top and strung together along their whole length by barbed wire; behind were sheds, huts, shelters, latrines, asphalt paths, old cans and empty tins, pieces of shell, paper, litter and unidentifiable junk of all sorts, a fitting monument of the age of tin and brass. I have not the skill to convey the indescribable ugliness and dreariness of this place. . . . A little further on our age broke out again in the form of Yatesbury Camp, sown broadcast over

Savernake Forest which had been ruthlessly thinned to accommodate it. Everywhere noble trees had been cut down to make room for ignoble huts; chunks of metal and sheets of corrugated iron lay about among the bracken, ugly sheds were protected by barbed-wire enclosures, while down every vista notice boards perked up forbidding everything from the lighting of fires to the picking of primroses. Since we cannot create beauty, the least that might be expected of us is that we should preserve the beauty that God gave us or that man has bequeathed to us from a more gracious past. The expectation is, alas, unjustified. Beauty outrages us and we desecrate it, wherever we find it. Nature makes us feel small and strange and cheap and ugly, so we pay Nature out by leaving weals upon her face in the shape of concrete roads and a rash of tin and brass and asphalt.

At Chippenham the buildings changed. Grey stone began to give way to mellowed brick, and Marlborough was wholly a brick town. But how lovely were these old brick buildings with their warm, red roofs strung along each side of a street so nobly spacious that not even the lines of cars, lying like black slugs along its sides, could wholly destroy its beauty. B. pointed out the house in which he had lived as a Marlborough school-boy. It was ugly and prison-like, a fitting environment for the memories of bullying and boredom with which he beguiled my all too readily believing ears.

Just before Marlborough we had diverged to Avebury. This was my first visit and I was unprepared for the disturbance of feeling that the place induced. There was a black, thundery sky and every now and then, as I made my way along the grass ramparts, a few heavy drops of rain fell. These conditions, no doubt, accentuated without wholly accounting for the depression I felt, as I looked at these unmeaning chunks of stone. I asked myself all the usual questions: How did our Neolithic ancestors transport the stones? How did they set them up? What purpose were they intended to serve, and so

on? And then, another question: would our dumps of metal and tangles of wire, the kind of thing I had just seen at Corsham, set for our remote descendants the same enigmas as the Avebury monoliths set for us? Would they seem equally meaningless to *them*? Whether meaningless or not, said B., they would seem uglier.

And so on to yet another cross-section of the English scene, the Berkshire Downs. I have always belittled these in comparison with the Downs of Sussex. The latter, I have claimed, are more varied; they have steeper sides and more and more varied trees. From their summits there are great views of the sea, while their northern sides look down upon the green country of the Weald. I still think the Sussex Downs are superior, yet am prepared to confess that my opinion may be based on no surer foundation than the accident of my happening to know them better. For the Berkshire Downs, as I now noticed, are distinguished by the sense of great space. As far as the eye can see, the Downs, mostly cultivated now, roll away in graceful folds which are here and there diversified by little woods.

On the 19th, B.'s wife and I rode along the ridge as far as the Western end of the Fairmile facing towards East Ilsley. On the one side we looked down upon the plain of Oxfordshire, mile after mile of coloured field and woodland broken near Didcot by an enormous, dark-coloured patch, looking for all the world like a gaping wound. Another camp? No, Mrs. B. said, "That's the new atomic bomb factory!" Even here, remote as I had thought it, the signs of man's prevailing preoccupation, the slaughter of his fellows made their inevitable appearance and with a jolt I came back to the twentieth century, which I had left behind at Corsham Dump.

August 19th, 1946

QUESTIONS IN THE VILLAGE CHURCH

WENT TO THE village church in the morning with the Bs. B's. wife, B. and myself the only adults present, beside the Vicar. As usual after contact with the Church, came away with my head buzzing with questions.

The children misbehaved badly; they fidgeted in their seats, turned round to stare at me, giggled at one another, shuffled with their feet. There was some surreptitious pinching. It was obvious that most of them did not understand the service or know what it was all about. How could they be expected to understand, since most of them were some six or seven years old; others even younger? These last spent their time unashamedly looking at the picture books they had brought with them into church.

I found the presence of these uncomprehending infants at best distracting, at worst demoralising, which means, I suppose, that I have now acquired enough feeling for Christianity and enough affection for the services of the Church to experience a slight sense of outrage that they should be subjected to such treatment. These children presumably attended because they were made to attend and wouldn't have gone to church of their own accord. First question, then, who made them, since none of their parents were present?

Second question: why should they be made? It seems to me that in the interests of religion the compulsory attendance of misbehaving children ought to be stopped, since its main effect is to breed boredom and contempt in their hearts and to distract and worry the one or two adults who want to take the thing seriously.

On reflection, I suppose that the children were sent by their parents, who wanted them out of their way on a

Sunday morning in order that they might prepare the Sunday dinner and read the paper undistracted. I understand that the Church in these later years has come to perform a much valued function as a dustbin for the depositing of refuse children on a Sunday morning.

Third question: the service, although it was at ten and was the only service that morning, was not Morning Prayer, but was the Communion Service, which my host and hostess called "the Mass." Why? Isn't it prescribed that Morning Prayer should be read on a Sunday morning? Isn't the Holy Communion of all services the most difficult for a company of children, none of whom had been confirmed, to make head or tail of?

But since Holy Communion it had to be, why were we not allowed to participate? For me, the walking up to the altar, the kneeling, the taking of the bread and the drinking from the cup constitute the most impressive moments in the whole service. If at any time I were for a brief moment to get a hint of a suggestion of Christ's existence and presence, this would be the moment. Certainly it is at this moment, if at any, that my spirit is touched by an influence from without and takes such impression as might conceivably affect my conduct on possibly one occasion—I wouldn't put it higher—during the week. Why, then, must this moment be omitted? Does the priest perform the ceremony for us, so that we participate, as it were, by proxy? If so, why?

Fourth question: there was a dreadful harmonium, very badly played, the accustomed player being away on holiday. The sounds it made were dreary in the extreme, being excelled in badness only by the singing, which consisted of the children's voices singing hymns and chants which they didn't know and singing them all too often out of tune. The result was a continuous ugliness of sound, rising every now and then to a climax of discord which was horrible to hear. I tried to join in but, as I have so often found in Anglican churches, hymns and

responses were pitched too high for my normally pitched voice, and I could not reach them. The incumbent had chosen long hymns with many verses not one of which was omitted, and never missed a chance of intoning the prayers and responses. This naturally slowed down the proceedings, so that what with the length of the hymns, the uncertain playing of the harmonium and the slow tempo at which everything was taken, the service was a good deal longer than it need have been and longer than it usually is. By the end of it the children were almost unmanageable. Let us suppose that God is, indeed, present in church, as the exponents of Anglo-Catholicism believe. Should He not, one wonders, be served with beauty instead of ugliness and if, for whatever reason, beauty is unavailable, then with as little in the way of ugliness as can be contrived? My fourth question is, then, why defiantly try to sing where no singing is, instead of being content to read with, perhaps, one hymn?

Fifth question arose on the Second Lesson. This made me sit up. Taken from Luke xvi, it dealt with the unjust steward. The whole parable seemed to me difficult to understand, but two points struck me as quite incomprehensible. First, the unjust steward is praised because he cheated a little. A man owes his master 100 measures of oil, the steward doesn't let him off the whole amount, when presumably he might have done so; he lets him off fifty measures. Another owes 100 measures of wheat and the steward lets him off twenty. The comment is, "And the lord commended the unjust steward, because he had done wisely." Is he to be commended, I wondered, (a) because it was *only* a little that he cheated, because, in fact, he did not cheat more by letting the debtors off the lot? Or (b) is he commended because any kind of cheating is a good? (b) seems to me to make nonsense of Christianity; (a) is not much better, for why, one wonders, should he cheat at all.

Second point: at the end of the parable there is the strange injunction to "make to yourselves friends of the

mammon of unrighteousness." This, too, seems to make nonsense of Christianity. (a) Assuming that the word "wrong" means anything, assuming, that is to say, that morality isn't nonsense, what we are enjoined to do is obviously "wrong"; (b) it is also contrary to the general tenor of Christian doctrine and inconsistent with countless other sayings of Christ—sayings, for example, to the effect that we should *not* set store by the things of this world, but *should* take heed of those of the next. Is irony, then, one wonders, to be suspected? I read the passage through afterwards and it certainly does not *sound* ironical; on the contrary, Christ seems to have been as grave as a judge.

I made these points to B. and together we looked up the commentaries; they were voluminous. Sweating and struggling, the commentators glossed over, explained away, read between the lines and read between lines that were not there. But none of them succeeded in softening to my satisfaction the harsh outlines of Christ's repudiation of His own teaching. I was left with the conviction that Samuel Butler had the best of it. Noting that you cannot serve both God and mammon, "Granted," he comments, "that it is not easy; but nothing that is worth doing ever is easy." Christ seems for once to have agreed with Butler.

The effect of all this on the children did not, I suppose, matter, since they did not understand it anyway. The effect on the Bs. did not matter; they were so deep-dyed in faith that they could digest anything. The effect on nine-tenths of whatever adults still attend church does not matter; they don't listen to the Lessons or, if they do, take what they hear for granted and would no more dream of questioning it than I would question the multiplication table. It is only upon a few doubters like myself who think that Christianity is the only hope of a distracted world and *want* desperately to believe, who try, albeit it very intermittently to follow Christ, praying hard for the divine assistance which we are told will be

granted to us if we believe, in order that we may follow Him more closely and live better lives and believe more fully, but who yet never seem to make progress, for we are so manifestly no better than we were before and yet we go on hoping and trying and intermittently praying—it is only, I say, upon us and upon such as us that these extremely ambiguous sayings have such a distressing effect. It is not that we are unable to understand that the sayings of a divine being might well be incomprehensible; it is not, therefore, that we expect to be able to understand everything that Christ says. It is that we are first told that we must become innocent and humble in mind, become, in other words, like fishermen and children to whom, presumably, are revealed truths which are denied to our sophisticated understandings and *then* regaled with explanations which, however readily they may pass down the gullet of faith are a palpable affront to the eye of understanding. It is *this* that we find so exasperating when we have not, as yet, the easy gullets of the faithful.

September 12th, 1946

THE ALLEGED WONDERS OF THE PHYSICAL UNIVERSE

AT BREAKFAST THIS morning A. B. told me that he had been reading a book by Sir James Jeans. A. B. is an extremely likeable and sympathetic chap. He is also intellectually very impressionable; ideas excite him and he is apt to throw up his hands in delighted amazement over each new one that comes his way. As usually happens in such cases, the new idea, having lived its brief and exciting day in the wandering sunshine of A. B.'s attention, sinks into the limbo of the accustomed or the darkness of the forgotten, as the sun of its successor rises enticingly over the horizon of B.'s ingenuous mind.

What particularly excited him in Jeans's book was the vastness of the universe. One after another Jeans's ingenious similes were trotted out. There was the simile of the grains of sand on the seashore to indicate the number of the stars and the planets, our own "a millionth part of a grain of sand of all the sea-sand in the world." "The zones," A. B. read, "within which life is possible all added together constitute less than a thousand million millionth part of space," a reflection which Jeans reinforced by the simile about the three oranges at Bâle, and Omsk and San Francisco—but I forget the exact spots at which Jeans postulated the oranges—to indicate the comparative rarity of the cosmic conditions in which life alone might be conceived to be possible. Nor, I imagine, does my forgetfulness matter, since he cannot have measured the distances between the three hypothetical oranges any more than he can have measured the distances between the stars. Betelgeuse, with its diameter of over two hundred million miles is nine hundred and thirty million million miles away, so that if the centre of this star were placed at the centre of the

sun, the orbit of the earth would still fall within the area which the star occupied; and so on. A. B. actually said that all this made him feel very insignificant. How, he wanted to know, could we matter in or to a universe of which we occupied so tiny a part? That life should have turned up in this one little corner and possibly in a few others looked to him very much like an unplanned accident, as, indeed, it did to Jeans.

I could not resist the temptation of adding to the Jeans effect. "Think now," I said, "of time. Isn't man's life just as insignificant in terms of time as his body is in terms of space? Consider," I bade him, "the facts. It is estimated that there has been life of some sort on the earth for twelve hundred million years, human life, giving the benefit of the doubt to all doubtful specimens of the human, such as Neanderthal man and the owner of the Piltdown skull, for about a million; human civilisation, again giving doubtful cases the benefit of the doubt, for about six thousand. Scale the figures down to make them manageable, so that the whole past of life is reckoned at a hundred years. Then the past of human life is a month and of human civilisation between four and five hours. Astronomers have estimated that, barring accidents, the period during which the conditions in which life, as we know it, can exist will obtain upon the earth is about twelve hundred thousand million years, that is to say, about a thousand times as long as the whole of the past history of life, or in terms of the revised time scales, a hundred thousand years. We have, it is obvious, a long past beyond us and an even longer future in front of us. Judged by these standards, our civilisation and its achievements occupy no more than the time taken by the flutter of an eyelid.

"But all this vastness," I said, "is very far from being the end of the story. Consider the infinite littleness that lies, as it were, on the other side of us," and, going to the bookcase, I got out Andrade's admirable book, *The Mechanism of Nature*, and began to cite facts relative to

the infinitely small. "Do you know," said I, "that the amount of current that flows through an ordinary electric bulb requires the passage of a million, million, million electrons every second?"

By this time I considered that A. B.'s state of mind was ripe for the famous passage from Pascal's *Pensées* on *The Two Infinites* and taking down the book I read to him those eloquent pages which tell how man is poised, as it were, on a balancing point between the infinitely great and the infinitely small, so that his condition is that of a mean or mid-way creature. Both the extremes between which he is set outrun his powers of pictorial imagination. Where, then, is he to look for the key to his understanding of the universe? Pascal's answer is, into his own soul, which comprehending both the littleness and the vastness of the material world by which he is surrounded, nevertheless overtops and triumphs over the material by reason of its power to comprehend it.

"But this is not at all the effect that these facts of astronomy and physics have upon me," said B. "On the contrary, they make me feel utterly and hopelessly insignificant, seeming, as they do, to confirm the old-fashioned materialist picture of man as an outside passenger, straying for a brief moment of time across a tiny corner of an alien universe, in which the lifeless and the brutal conditions and determines what is living and akin. When we consider these facts, life's presence in the universe takes on the character of an accidental and unplanned phenomenon. One day the phenomenon will finish its pointless journey with as little fuss as, in the person of the amoeba, it once began it. The whole process of life's evolution is thus seen to be totally without cosmic significance. . . ." He elaborated the point at length.

"That," I told him, "is how I used to feel."

"Don't you now?" he asked.

I said that I did not, and he asked what it was that had caused me to change my attitude?

This was in part a historical, in part a biographical question, and hitherto I had not considered it. At the time I gave B. a confused answer which, in a rambling sort of way, covered some of the ground and only afterwards tried to sort it out.

On reflection, I found that there were four factors which had played their part inducing the change, and to clear my own mind I will try to set them out here. First, we are unable imaginatively to picture to ourselves the nature of a million. We simply cannot comprehend it; therefore, it is not very interesting, precisely because we cannot think about it effectively.

If this is true of a million, it is just as true, perhaps truer, of a million million. Therefore a million million does not mean any more to us than a million; in fact—and I am still speaking in terms of introspectibly observable psychological processes, the effect of piling up millions is not dissimilar from the effect of piling up anything else—for example, the leather armchairs on the floors of business men's country houses, or the rings on the fingers of their wives; it is, that is to say, a slightly vulgar effect. A thing is cheapened when it is overdone. The multiplication of the very large or the very small does not awe; it slightly repels on the ground of excess. Too great a multiplication of space or time produces, in short, the effect of any other offence against the doctrine of "the mean."

Secondly, let us assume that space and time are real, and that their nature is, pretty much what common sense takes it to be. Then they must be infinite. For consider space: either it is bounded or it is not. If it is not, then it is boundless—that is to say, infinite. But suppose it to be bounded. Now, a boundary implies the existence of something on the other side of the boundary. If there was nothing, not even empty space—assuming that empty space is something—on the other side of the boundary, the boundary would not bound. But if there is something on the other side of the boundary, that

“something” must be in space; even if there is only empty space on the other side of the boundary—and empty space is for the purpose of our present consideration being taken to be “something”—then, once again, there is space beyond the boundary, so that the alleged boundary of space turns out not to be a boundary at all.

Similarly with time. Either it stops or it does not; if it does not, it is infinite; if it stops there must be a moment at which it stops; this, presumably, is the last moment in time. What happens after this last moment? Presumably nothing at all, or perhaps it would be more correct to say timelessness. But then, presumably, there must be a moment at which timelessness begins which moment will be after the last moment in time.

To put this more technically, let T stand for time and E for eternity, in the sense in which to be eternal is to be timeless. What is the relation between T and E ? Is this relation in time in the sense in which eternity begins *after* time is over, or is it timeless in the sense of not being in time at all? If the former, T goes on into and infects E , since E has at least *one* temporal relation. If the latter, E infects T and T is not and never was purely temporal, since it has at least one non-temporal relation. On the first hypothesis, it turns out that T is not, after all, bounded by eternity; on the second, T , having a non-temporal boundary, cannot be timelike through and through; time, then, cannot be of the essence of reality.

This latter hypothesis is the one which most philosophers have adopted both as regards time and as regards space. Neither time nor space, they have pointed out, will bear thinking about, since if the mind starts to analyse them, it is immediately led into some kind of contradiction such as that in which the immediately preceding argument has just been entangled. Now, reality, it is said, must be rational, by which is meant that the mind must be able to think about it without being brought up against the *impasse* of an irresolvable contradiction. It follows that since time and space, if

taken as real in the sense in which common sense supposes them to be real, lead to contradiction, they cannot be real. It is on these lines that most philosophers have argued.

Whatever be the truth of the matter, we may, I think, safely conclude either that time and space are such as they are normally taken to be, in which they are infinite—that is to say, not bounded—or else that they are wholly other than we normally take them to be.

Suppose the former. Then it ought not, I said, to disturb us to be told by astronomers that something which on general grounds we had already concluded to be infinite is, in fact, very, very large. Certainly it should not depress us; and as a matter of psychological fact, although thinking about the very large or, alternatively, about the very small in space and about the very long or, alternatively, the very short in time has a slightly dreary effect—oh dear, how empty it is and how it does go on, one thinks—the effect of thinking about infinity, in so far as this is possible, is slightly exalting.

Now, suppose the latter; then any one of a number of hypotheses may be embraced. Most of them are idealist, as, for example, that time and space are forms or concepts imposed by our own thinking upon the world about which we think, in which case, they are not independent of us. But in this event there is nothing in their vastness to depress us, since this is a testimony to nothing but the grandiose powers of the human mind that imposes them. There is much in modern physics to support this view.

We should, I suggested, do well to think of science as of a match that man has just got alight. At first it seemed to reveal only an indifferent world, an alien darkness divested of human comfort without assurance of consolation for our sufferings and insignificance. Now that the preliminary splutter is over and the flame burns up clearer, there are moments in which man's life seems rather to be set in a temple and the light to be reflected

from walls inscribed with secrets and pillars carved with systems that have been written out in his own hand.

Or we may say that the world to which time and space seem to apply is not the real world but one that, at best semi-real, is shot through with change and decay. As to the real world, it is both timeless and spaceless. This view has the further advantage of relieving the mind from the depressing effect of contemplating man's insignificance in an alien vastness, since the alien vastness is now deposed from full title to reality in favour of another order of being, a real order, which may quite possibly be akin to ourselves.

Thirdly,—and here we come to the really important question—can the scientific account of the universe be accepted as all embracing?

Let us assume the principle of the uniformity of Nature, the principle according to which every cause produces always and everywhere the same effect which is in theory a predictable effect, and no events occur except as the results of wholly determining causes; let us assume, in other words, that the physical world is a reciprocally determining world and functions after the model of the works of a gigantic clock. This, by the way, is an assumption which, though it may hold in its application to the world of large scale phenomena, that is to say, to the familiar world, which is also the world studied by astronomy and recorded by geology and history, is highly dubious in its application to infinitesimals—that is to say, to the world of microscopic phenomena studied by atomic physics. Nevertheless, let us make it. Having made it, we cannot avoid noticing that the principle cannot account for there being a world for determinism to apply to. The uniformity of Nature may describe the workings of the world; it cannot explain its origin. It is here that we come within sight of the familiar case for theism. It runs, I suggested, as follows: the world must, so to speak, have “got here” somehow; yet how could it have “got here” unless

somebody or something put it here? To postulate a "something" is to postulate a prior *physical* cause, the effect of the admission being merely to put the problem to be solved further back in point of time. Hence, we seem to need a "somebody," that is to say, a creative mind to perform the initial act of presenting the scientist with a universe whose workings he proceeds to decipher. But if this is so, the physical world of time and space is not all that there is; it is not even the ultimate or original form of being. In addition we must postulate the prior occurrence of a creative event which in its turn entails the existence of a mind to create. The conclusion seems, then, to be forced upon us that at the heart of things there is something mental and spiritual, is, in fact, a mind or even perhaps a being not wholly other than ourselves.

At this point a fourth reflection suggests itself. The insignificance and infrequency of life, and particularly of human life, in the vast immensities of astronomical space and geological time are capable of suggesting a conclusion different from that which had oppressed B. For considerations touching the vastness of the physical universe and the insignificance of life cut both ways. The more the insignificance and infrequency are stressed, the odder it appears that that which is so insignificant and infrequent should occur at all. The universe certainly does not *seem* to have been designed as a stage for the drama of life. What an immense prologue in point of time before the play began, what a vast theatre for such a tiny stage! These considerations admittedly suggest at first sight that life is a temporary and unplanned accident.

But on second thoughts they only increase one's surprise that the accident should have occurred at all. Why this unique thing, life, this even more unique thing, mind, occurring in a universe which, so far as we can tell, has throughout the greater part of its history been lifeless and mindless and throughout the greater part of its area is lifeless and mindless still?

If it is an accident, it is a very odd one; certainly not an accident that anybody could have possibly foreseen, had he inspected the universe, as it were from outside, before life had appeared in it.

But grant that the appearance of life was not an accident, but was an event of the same kind as the occurrence of the universe itself and life must be interpreted as the expression of a creative act undertaken as part of a wider plan.

I did not, of course, suggest that this argument is conclusive—far from it; merely that the insignificance and infrequency of life in relation to the vastness of the spread of space and the span of time are capable of bearing a different interpretation from that which is commonly placed upon them. I suggested, further, that the greater the emphasis laid upon the infrequency and insignificance on the one hand and upon the vastness on the other, the stronger the case for the second, the different, interpretation. To emphasise the one is, in fact, to strengthen the case for the other.

I cannot be sure if I said all this that morning to B., marshalling fact and argument into a series of ordered reflections, as I have marshalled them here. Indeed, I cannot have done so, since the reflections I have set down are more than can have passed between two men sitting at a 1946 breakfast table, apart altogether from the time taken in reading Pascal.

Yet something of the kind I must have said, for B. went away comforted, as he averred, in the present and resolved to think the thing out again for himself in the future.

I took leave to doubt this, laughing at him and telling him that Dr. Johnson had said that there were no public worries, only private worries. No man, he asserted—I am quoting from memory, however, and have no right to inverted commas—ever lost a wink of sleep because of a public worry. Dr. Johnson was thinking, I suppose, of affairs of State, affirming the triviality of their impact

upon one's consciousness in comparison with the all-embracing absorption of one's interest in one's own affairs. But if what he said is true of public worries—it isn't now, though perhaps it was in the happy days of the eighteenth century—how much truer, I suggested, of cosmic worries. "No," I said to B., "you won't think it out at leisure; in fact, I doubt if you will ever think of it again."

October 20th, 1946

AIR TRAVEL TO BRUSSELS

TO BRUSSELS BY 'PLANE. Thought again, for the hundredth time, what a beastly mode of conveyance an aeroplane is. To begin with, 'planes always seem to start at unnatural hours—for example, 7.55 a.m. on a Sunday morning at Imperial Airways House, Victoria. What a time!

Remembering how infrequently Tube trains run on a Sunday morning, you have to get up preternaturally early, and as a result feel irritable and low for the rest of the day; or, if you decide to go by car, thus contriving to start a little later, you have to throw yourself on somebody's good offices to drive the car home again.

You wait half an hour or so at Imperial Airways House, drive for the best part of an hour through the concentric rings of nineteenth-century and twentieth-century suburban England, wait another half-hour or so at the airport and so into the 'plane.

Does everybody, I wonder, on entering a 'plane, feel as low and apprehensive as I do? Probably not; yet there is no laughter and little talking. In silence we take our segregated seats and, cut off from our fellow men, prepare to face the ensuing hours of self-study and self-dissatisfaction. For you cannot talk in these conveyances; the din is too terrific. You cannot see out of the window, since even when you are not in cloud—and you usually are—the outstretching wings of the 'plane occlude most of the view. You cannot smoke, you cannot move about, and it is difficult to read. In fact, compared with a ship or even a train, a 'plane is uncomfortable to the body and oppressive to the soul, being, in fact, one more step along the path of progressive dehumanisation whereby, instead of the machine being made to adapt itself to the needs of the human, the human is made to accommodate himself to the demands of the machine. All this makes for

a lowering of the spirit, so that self-study—and this, apart from idly turning over the pages of periodicals which on the ground one would never dream of contemplating for more than two minutes, is about the only occupation that is left to one—almost inevitably turns into self-dissatisfaction, with the result that one is in no shape to endure with cheerfulness the actual discomforts and hardships of flying. These I find formidable. I can never, for example, take for granted the fact of being in the air without any visible means of support, and am in a state of perpetual apprehension lest the thing should drop, which, in view of the laws of gravitation, is precisely what it ought to do. If for an hour or so it runs with absolute smoothness and stability, I begin to forget about the empty space below and start to read with a comparatively quiet mind. Suppose, however, what is sufficiently rare, that a period of smooth and stable running has been vouchsafed to you, so that your apprehensions are sufficiently stilled to enable you to turn to your book; almost immediately the thing takes your action as a signal to misbehave. It pitches, jolts and lurches, and every now and then there is a sickening little drop—"only an air-pocket," they say. "There is nothing to get alarmed about." But my heart drops, nevertheless, with the 'plane; drops, in fact, right into my boots and I begin to long for the journey to be over.

I have said earlier in this diary that "boat-time" is the slowest of all times. So, no doubt, it is when you are in a boat. But when you are in a 'plane you realise that "aeroplane-time" is still slower. You look at your watch; you look at it again and find to your consternation that the hands have hardly moved, or that they have moved just enough to banish the agreeable supposition that it has stopped.

If there is a fog the experience is alarming. The aeroplane cannot find its landing place; it swoops down sickeningly, noses about, as my 'plane did off Gothenburg last year a few score feet above rocks and

breakers, then with a great jolt lifts itself up again and so three or four times as it vainly searches for the aerodrome. The terrified passengers glance apprehensively at each other, fearing the worst, and make opportunities to talk to the attendant in order to solicit from him the assurance that this is all in the normal day's work. Or you cruise about for what seem to be hours in the fog, waiting to take your place along the radar beam— if that is what it is called—down which you must travel to find the airport. You know that other 'planes are queueing up for *their* places along the radar beam and every moment you expect to hit one. You can see nothing; there is nobody to talk to and you haven't the faintest idea when this horrible experience will come to an end. Suppose, you say to yourself, that we *don't* find the radar beam, or that our petrol gives out, or that another 'plane *does* come and hit us? You distrust the assurances of the attendant that at any moment now your turn may come as a mere base subterfuge to calm your twittering nerves. Yet you feel worse if there are no attendant and, therefore, no assurances. . . .

When the horrible experience is over, the vehicle appeased and you at last brought to earth, you emerge shattered and yellow to cope with the customs men and the passports men and the currency men and the men who ask innumerable questions about your health and your family and the duration and purpose of your visit and your age, to surmount in fact, as best you can, the barriers with which States seek to protect themselves against visitors from other States.

Come to Italy, they say, or France, or Sweden, or Belgium while, at the same time, doing their best to make your coming so arduous and humiliating that you swear you will never go abroad again, least of all in an aeroplane. The formalities at Brussels were easier than most—or, perhaps I was assisted by the kind offices of the British Council to overcome them—and in a surprisingly short time we found ourselves in the centre of the city.

October 23rd, 1946

BRUSSELS: THE HORRORS OF HOTELS

I PASS BY ALL THE events of this trip, the pleasure of the laden shops, the pleasure of the planned and spacious streets, the pleasure of the full belly and the cheap wine, the pleasure after six years of hearing French spoken again and of trying, how ineffectively, to speak it, the pleasure of the lecture and the unexpected pleasure of the kisses, one on each cheek, by the enthusiastic chairman—one had forgotten these Gallic courtesies—and of the presentation medal—*Hommage à C. E. M. Joad*, it was inscribed—that followed the lecture. Of one fly only in the ointment of so many and such varied pleasures I would speak, the hotel.

It was a well-to-do hotel, well appointed, fully staffed, prodigiously expensive, chosen for me as the most comfortable hotel in the most central position of Brussels. That was the point; its central position. People have a habit of building hotels at the junction of a number of roads. Now, the junction of roads is all too often the junction of tram lines—is, therefore, the noisiest spot in the town. In choosing such central positions hotel builders show their ignorance of the main function or, rather, of one of the two main functions of a hotel. A hotel is for feeding in and sleeping in—and, more particularly, in the contemporary world—for sleeping in. From this fundamental purpose of a hotel, one can deduce the main excellence of a hotel bedroom—that it should be quiet. "A bathroom, complete with lavatory," they tell me; "a private sitting-room, a beautiful view, a telephone, armchairs, an Aubusson carpet, damask linen and lawn sheets, bells for valets, bells for maids and the Lord knows what!" But what is all this to me if my sumptuous bedroom is deficient in the overriding

requisite and prime excellence of bedrooms—quiet? What do all these glories matter if I cannot sleep? And how few are the hotel bedrooms in which one can sleep. Scarcely has one got into bed than one becomes aware of noises—noises which, as the slow hours pass, become a torment. Let me list three.

First, there is the torment of the traffic and, pre-eminent among the traffic, of the trams. Outside my Brussels hotel was a square in which several lines of tramways met. The lines were ill-laid or old, with the result that the trams approached with a maximum of bumping, jolting and screeching. They bumped, jolted and screeched their way over the points, bumped, jolted and screeched their way round the Square, bumped, jolted and screeched their way out of it—four lines of bumpers, jolters and screechers, which meant that there was never more than a two minutes interval between the bumpings, joltings and screechings. “They will stop at eleven,” I said to myself; “or at worst at midnight.” I was wrong. They stopped at one and began again at five, but during those few hours of comparative silence my jangled nerves refused me sleep.

Secondly, there is the torment of the pipes. All comparatively modern hotels pride themselves on hot and cold water laid on to the bedroom. I wish they didn’t; for then one might get some sleep. So badly is the system laid, so thin are the walls, that whenever anyone turns a tap anywhere along the corridor, the pipes running down the walls of one’s room come alive. They gurgle and bubble, hiss and spit like so many flatulent snakes. Whenever anybody pulls a lavatory chain they burst into the activity of a waterfall. Inevitably in a moderate sized hotel, tap turning and chain-pulling happen very frequently. In my Brussels hotel they seemed to go on intermittently all night. I must admit that the bedroom of the little hotel to which I have gone for years in Paris suffers from the same disease. It has literally dozens of pipes trailing like grey serpents

down one corner of its walls. But this, at least, is Paris and somehow one overlooks things in Paris. Besides, I have been going there since I was a young man and have in some curious way grown used to these particular pipes, just as one gets used after a time to a familiar pain. Moreover, this, after all, is a little hotel, which means that the number of people who turn taps and pull plugs is comparatively small. But this hotel in Brussels was vast and what with washing and teeth-cleaning and bathing and plug-pulling in lavatories, the clients seemed to be at it all night. At any rate the pipes played all night their horrible variations on the theme of flatulence, all of which brings me to the third torment, the torment of the people.

Always in a hotel there are people who seem to go to bed later and other people who seem to get up earlier than people have ever been known to do before. You hear their steps in the corridor; you hear the banging of their doors; you hear the depositing of their boots; you hear them whistling, singing, gargling. Often the walls are so thin that you hear their voices in conversation—I heard the most shocking conversation that has ever affronted the innocence of a young man's ears through the walls of a hotel bedroom—or they clump along the passage in preternaturally heavy boots so late and again so early that the blessed period of quiet between the going to bed of the last and the rising of the first is reduced to a bare two or three hours. What with the torment of the traffic, the torment of the pipes and the torment of the people, I got myself into a terrible state.

There opened out of my grandiose bedroom a sort of cupboard designed for the accommodation of clothes. There was just room to lie down full length on the floor, so pulling mattress and bedclothes off the bed, I strewed them on the floor of the cupboard and lay down upon them. When I had shut the cupboard door, I was to some extent immune from the torment of the trams and the torment of the pipes, although the noise of footsteps

in the passage was louder than ever. Here, half suffocated, for there was no ventilation, I was found by the chambermaid in the morning. She said little, passing this incident off in her mind with the reflection that the English are mad, anyway.

In sum, I suppose I must have slept for about an hour and a half on the floor of the cupboard. The torments of sleeplessness are well-known and I have nothing to add to the horrifying descriptions they have evoked. (One of the best known to me by the way is that wonderful chapter in Meredith's *Diana of the Crossways*—why does nobody read Meredith now?—describing the impact upon the ears of Percy Dacier of the midnight bell at Rovio.)

I venture, however, to dwell for a moment upon two of its characteristics which I don't think have been sufficiently stressed. (1) The boringness of sleeplessness in the present; there is nothing to do and nothing to think about except one's failure to go to sleep. (2) Its anxiety for the future; for you know that you are not only enduring a present evil, the boredom of not being able to sleep, but have still to endure a future one, the condition of being a wreck next day. As I lay and tossed in my cupboard, I vowed to myself that I would, in future, scrupulously observe one of the few rules that I have independently discovered and made for myself as I have gone through life, rules that are all my own and whose observance is, for me, wholly beneficial, such as the rule never to smoke until after the mid-day meal, or the rule, when working at home in the morning, to have no breakfast at all. Now the rule whose non-observance was now taking its painful toll of me was the rule never to go to a hotel alone. For hotels are like marriage in this that, while the latter provides, the former demand a companion in the night. The one enduring gain of marriage is that there is always somebody there to be woken up and induced to make you a cup of tea; the accompanying chat in the middle of the night breaks up

your sleepless mood and there is at least a chance that afterwards you may be able to go to sleep. This is the one solid advantage of marriage and nowhere is its weight more surely felt than in hotels.

November 20th, 1946

HOTEL AT P——

IT HAPPENS THAT THE next entry that I have had the chance of making in this diary is also recorded in an hotel. This time I am in an hotel in P——, but it might just as well have been in Preston, or Manchester, or Leeds, or Hull, for the hotel, being the leading hotel, overlooks, as is the habit of its kind, the town's centre. There are no trams, but there is a maelstrom of cars, lorries and buses so that with my Brussels experience vividly in mind I asked for a room at the back. The girl in the office raised her non-existent eyebrows: "we have only small rooms at the back," she said, "and they look out on to the 'well.' And there are no basins with hot water laid on."

I was delighted. Not only no traffic, but no pipes. I insisted on having just such a room. The girl did not like giving it to me. She said disparagingly that the charge for it would be a good deal less and that the organisation responsible for me had booked me a good, large front room. To appease her, I said I would pay for the back room which looked on to the "well" and which had no hot water laid on what I would have paid for the front room with its running hot and cold and its nice view of the street. I could see that she thought that I was mad.

It was, indeed, a horrid little room. It seemed quiet enough, but it smelt for some reason of chloroform. It was unprovided with a towel and the lighting was abominable. (1) In the first place, the "well" which the windows overlooked turned out to be roofed with frosted glass. Under the glass was some large chamber connected with the inner workings of the hotel, a kitchen or a scullery it might have been, where people seemed to be on duty all night. From the chamber below this glass roof

there emanated as the night wore on (*a*) the clatter of dishes; (*b*) talk and laughter; (*c*) a brilliant light. As the curtains which hung over my windows were woefully thin, the light streamed through the glass roof of the well, through the curtains and into the room. (2) There was, as there so often is in hotels, a glass pane over the door; consequently, the light from the passage also streamed into the room. Four times during the night I got up, went into the passage and turned it off; four times some brute or other turned it on again. This pane of glass over the door, admitter of noise and light from the passage, is a regular feature of hotel bedrooms. What, I wonder, can be its *raison d'être*? (3) When I came to consider the lights in the room itself, I found that there was only one and that this hung, unshaded, from the ceiling above the *foot* of the bed. There was no reading lamp; consequently, when one started one's reading in bed, the light shone directly into one's eyes. Let me here remark as two of the most unaccountable features of hotel bedrooms, that (*a*) the window and (*b*) the electric light are almost invariably at the foot of the bed, facing its occupant as he lies, not, as they should be, at its head, behind him. I conclude that hotels exist for clients who don't read, and I dare say I am quite right. For my part, I have frequently been driven to get out of bed, put bolster and pillows at its foot and lie on, though not in, the bed in order that the light should shine over my shoulders on to the page.

This is all very well in summer, but it won't do in winter. If I were clever enough to make beds, I would unmake my bed and remake it the other way round; but I am not. On this occasion, I lay at the focusing point of a number of lights—the light from the “well,” the light from the pane above the door, the light at the foot of the bed—which streamed in upon me from every quarter except the right one, so that I was frustrated, first, in my efforts to read and, presently, in my efforts to go to sleep.

I suppose I must finally have got off between two and three in the morning. About 6.30 I was awakened by the usual hotel noises. Maids began to chatter in and patter up and down the corridor, plates began to clatter in the "well," heavy footsteps clumped up and down the passage, Hoovers began to hum, the pipes to gurgle and the taps to whine in the bathroom next door. In the light of these experiences, I am moved to ask once again why it should be made impossible to sleep in a hotel bedroom for more than three or four hours during the night, and why hotels should make a point of sending their clients to cope with the world next day as nervous, irritable wrecks? Can nothing be done about this? Or about English hotels generally? The answer is that it has not been done these last hundred years, during any and every one of which people like myself have been complaining about the badness of English hotels, and there is not the slightest reason why it should be done now.

November 21st, 1946

LURE AND PERILS OF CUPIDITY

I FORGOT TO ADD that before I went to sleep last night I afforded myself a striking exhibition of weakness and cupidity. D., a film agent for whom I had done a short, well-paid, albeit humiliating job early in the war, was staying in the same hotel. He buttonholed me as I came in after my lecture and insisted on my joining him and his friends for a drink. We sat about rather gloomily in the hotel lounge, consuming unpleasing and expensive drinks of great alcoholic ferocity. What, I asked him, was he doing in P——? He said that he was engaged in making a film of T. and a very fine chap T. was and a very fine film it was going to be, although it was taking rather longer to make than they had expected, and they were fed up with being in P——.

“Who,” I asked, “is T.?”

When I asked this question, they thought that I was making fun of them. When they realised that I was serious, they registered astonishment. T. was a celebrated heavyweight boxer with goodness knows how many titles, belts and championships to his credit. He was now being groomed to meet the world's champion, inevitably an American, and D. was engaged in filming his home life. I spent some little time explaining to them how innocent it was of them to expect people like myself to know about boxers, and then went to bed.

As I lay, trying to read, there was a knock on the door of my room and D. entered. D., it appeared, had had an idea. Would I appear in the T. film?

“No,” I said emphatically.

“Just for two minutes.”

“No.”

“For a very considerable sum of money; in fact, for £x, to be paid now?”

"No."

"Why not?"

"If," I said, "I wanted to appear in a film, which I do not, it would be in my own film. I certainly do not want to appear in somebody else's film; I know nothing whatever about boxing and I have to get back to London in the morning in order to attend a luncheon!"

"What time? What train? What luncheon?" D. asked. I told him.

"That's easy," he said. "You go by a later train"—he named it—"and you will be only half an hour late for your luncheon. You will spend a quarter of an hour at T.'s house. I will send you from there in a car to the station. I will telephone to London and say you are going to be late for your luncheon."

Again I said, "No."

I went on saying it for three-quarters of an hour, but the importunate man wouldn't go. He sat on the end of my bed, pleading, persuading, cajoling, bribing, insisting. He would pay me more than £x; he would pay in notes; he would pay now. And with that he pulled a great wad of notes out of his pocket. Finally, I surrendered, not for £x, but for twice £x in notes taken from his pocket and paid over to me there and then.

Weakness, I repeat, and cupidity, and I lay awake half the night thinking about these character traits of mine. For why, after all, had I allowed myself to be persuaded against my better judgment? The money? Admittedly it was a large sum for the service proposed, but I was not particularly in need of money at the time, although I knew that the farm I had just bought was going to take all I had. The publicity? It would be of the most undesirable kind linking me with a professional boxer in the light of what—a clown, a stooge, a foil. . . ? I was not sure which of these rôles I was to fill, but whichever it was, I did not relish it. The fun of the thing? But there would be precious little fun in it for me; at best, the affair might be mildly amusing. The explanation

was, I concluded, simple enough. I had allowed myself to be overborne by persistence and plausibility. I ought to know better at my time of life, I told myself, as I lay awake, gloomily reflecting on my character amid the noises of the hotel.

This morning I did my piece of the film and the affair was, after all, highly diverting. Here was a very ordinary working-class home with nice Yorkshire people in it speaking in strong Yorkshire accents. Downstairs there were two rooms, the kitchen and the parlour, the former hung with belts and rosettes and photographs of the great man, the latter stuffed with fan mail. The letters, mostly unopened, were piled one on top of the other almost from floor to ceiling, so that it was only with the greatest difficulty that one could get into the room at all. Here was the great man's mother, a simple, good-natured soul, shy and a little dazed by what was happening in her kitchen, making uncountable cups of tea. Here, too, was his brother, a large, rather uncouth, working-class lad, lounging on a couple of chairs, and telling us of his determination to be as great a boxer as his brother. And here was the great man himself, a very large, modest, decent chap, talking of snooker at the club and his mates at the factory where he had once worked. Upon this decent, ordinary home had descended all the hullabaloo of the modern film industry, complete with operators, technicians, directors, publicity men, typists, reporters, photographers, and D. himself buzzing all over the place, deferential to T., polite to his mother, confidential with me, hearty with everybody. A fine "to-do" we made, with D. posing the "actors," upsetting the furniture and provoking Mrs. T. to make ever more cups of tea. My part in the film was derisory. "Brains versus brawn" was the idea, with myself featuring the former, T. the latter. I felt his muscles, he, with his great hand, spanned the width of my forehead: we registered awed admiration. I spanned his forehead; he felt my biceps; we laughed contemptuously. What we were made to say,

I can't remember. As the car whirled me off to the station. I comforted myself with two reflections.

First, I had seen the impact of one world— the world of the twentieth-century film industry—upon another, the working-class world of nineteenth-century Yorkshire industrialism, and seen, too, in miniature the process everywhere at work in our time whereby the first world exploits, uproots, corrupts and ultimately destroys the second.

Secondly, I had contrived to link up two departments of human activity which, once integrated in a harmonious whole, were now sharply split into two disparate, specialised spheres. By the Greeks the spectacle of a philosopher consorting with an athlete would have been taken for granted. It would have seemed to them wholly in the natural order of things—one has only to read the early Dialogues of Plato, the *Charmides*, for example, or the *Lysis*, especially the *Lysis*, to realise how natural—that the old, whose excellences, such as they were, were of the mind, should consort with the young, whose most manifest excellence was of the body. Each admired and paid tribute to what was excellent in the other.

In our day, except at Oxford and Cambridge, the thinker and the athlete inhabit different spheres which, precisely because they are never brought into contact, do not recognise one another's existence. In so far as they recognise one another, their recognition is intolerantly contemptuous. This is an aspect of the vicious specialisation of our time, which demands that a man should function only in one sphere of activity and know only his own kind. So we produce pin-headed sportsmen who never open a book, scholars who can't play games, and office and factory workers who think potatoes grow behind shop counters and don't know a cowslip from a primrose. Sometimes we make the worst of both worlds and produce hybrids with the heads of athletes on the bodies of thinkers. In so far as my little excursus into the world of films and boxing had contributed to the

mitigation of this rigid departmentalism, it was not wholly to be deplored; on the contrary, it was something to be proud of. Nevertheless, I must admit that the mood in which I journeyed to London was pensive.

November 30th, 1946

BRITTEN CONCERT. ARTICLES OF ÆSTHETIC FAITH

Britten Concert

A BAD THING HAPPENED to-day! X. suggested going to a concert at the Wigmore. "What are they playing?" I asked.

"Handel and Mozart. Something else, I don't know what, but certainly Handel and Mozart."

I agreed to go; a little apprehensive, no doubt, about the "something else," fearing lest it might be "modern," but reassuring myself with the thought that, if it turned out to be too bad, I could always go and read in the vestibule. Perhaps, I thought, there won't be very much of it; or, even if there is, perhaps the Handel and the Mozart will come first, so that one can go away at half-time. (But this last I knew in my heart to be a vain hope. The compilers of the programmes of mixed concerts which include "classical" and "modern" music never arrange all the "classical" in the first half, so that one can hear one's music and go away. The "moderns"—and especially if there is a first performance of a "novelty"—are sandwiched in the middle. By this device it is hoped to ensure that those who want to hear their Mozart will sit through the "novelty" whether they like it or not; whereas, if the programme were to finish with a "modern," the exodus after the Mozart might leave an audience composed only of stalwarts and friends.)

In the vestibule my friend met me with a grave face. "I am afraid there isn't much for us," he said, "only a Handel overture and a Mozart concerto."

"And the rest?"

"Gal," he said, "and Britten."

"Who's Gal?" I asked.

"Don't know; but as we have got the tickets let's go in and see."

The concert began with the Handel Overture to Faramondo. It was dignified and stately, pleasing to the ear and ennobling to the hearer, with a little gay bit in the middle, but short; in fact, it was all over in five minutes. Then came the Gal—a first performance this; surprisingly pleasant, I thought, for it was a derivative work full of reminiscences and, as I am very fond of the classical composers, I sat happily through the first two movements. In the last, however, it seemed to me that the composer's memory had failed him; anyway, my pleasure was less.

The Britten was the *pièce de résistance*; it consisted of music composed to Rimbaud's *Les Illuminations* and was to be conducted by the composer in person. It was divided into nine sections. The first impact of the music led me to invoke the fourth principle of my artistic faith.¹ "Has this music," I asked myself, "beauty of form?" No, I concluded; whatever may be its merits, it is certainly not formally beautiful—at least, if it is, its beauty belongs to no idiom with which I am familiar. "Ah, but that's just it," I reminded myself. "This is for you a new idiom and you must not expect to understand or to appreciate right away. Better sit it out! You know you have a prejudice against contemporary music; you know you are getting inelastic, unadaptable and old. Well, old as you are, try and learn something new for a change. See if you can find out what the composer is after and then maybe you'll like it better." Thus I comforted and admonished myself under the hail of sound that beat about my ears.

Moreover, in musical matters I am attentive to the voice of authority, and the work of Britten, I knew, had been greatly praised by E. Sackville West, who certainly knows "what's what," while, as to Rimbaud, was he not one of the Symbolist poets, treated at length in Maurice Bowra's recent book, of which everybody was speaking with respect? Symbolism, moreover, I knew, was just

¹ See p. 71 below.

now "all the go." So I decided to do my best to grapple with the novelty of the medium and resolved to sit the work out. It was not until after the third section that prejudice triumphed and I concluded that the work was not and never could be beautiful, whatever its idiom.

But perhaps beauty wasn't what Britten was after. Perhaps it was expression? Yes, that must be it. But here my third principle¹ came into play, insisting that expressiveness is not a good in itself, and that what matters is the nature of that which is expressed; if this were trivial or evil, then the more articulate the expression, the worse. It followed that if the excellence of this music consisted in its expressiveness, everything depended upon what was being expressed.

I turned to the sixpenny copy of Rimbaud's *Illuminations*, thoughtfully provided with an English translation for the benefit of those attending the concert. It seemed to me that what I read could be conveniently divided into three categories, the symbolical, the silly and the undesirable. I will give examples of each of these categories, quoting the English in case my failure in comprehension and appreciation should be due to my inadequate knowledge of the French language:

Category 1: "Against a background of snow is a beautiful Being of majestic stature. Death is all round her, and whistling, dying breaths, and circles of hollow music, cause this adored body to rise, to swell, and to tremble like a spectre. Scarlet and black wounds break out on the superb flesh. Colours which belong to life, deepen, dance, and separate themselves around the vision, upon the path."

This, I concluded, must be symbolic because on the surface it seemed to me to be completely meaningless—a mere saying of things.

Here is another example of the same kind:

"Oh, gracious son of Pan! Thine eyes—those precious globes glance slowly; thy brow is crowned with little

¹ See p. 71.

flowers and berries. Thy hollow cheeks are spotted with brown lees. Thy breast resembles a cithara; tinkling sounds run through thy blond arms. Thy heart beats in that womb where sleeps Hermaphrodite. Walk at night, softly moving this thigh, this other thigh, this left leg."

I thought at first that I understood this—it seemed to be a fairly intelligible description of a rustic god—until I came to the "tinkling sounds" in the arms and the movement of the left leg. Then I knew that it must be symbolic:

(a) because sounds don't occur in or run down arms;

(b) because otherwise there is no point in the exhortation to move the *left* leg. Why the left, I asked myself? I could not imagine. "Why the left?" I asked the little Jewess sitting next to me, rapt in the final ecstasy of appreciation. "Do you suppose there was something the matter with the right?" But she said it was a silly question, so I concluded that something was being symbolised, though I did not know what.

Category 2: "These are very sturdy rogues. Many of them have made use of you and your like. Without wants, they are in no hurry to put into action their brilliant faculties and their experience of your consciences. What mature men! Here are sottish eyes out of a mid-summer night's dream—red, black, tricoloured eyes of steel spotted with golden stars."

My only reason for putting this into Category 2, the silly, as opposed to Category 1, the symbolical, is that I *can* detect a trace of meaning here, though I should be hard put to it to make a *précis*; but such as it is, it seems to me pretty pointless and I can't conceive why anybody should think it worth conveying, or why, when it is conveyed, it should be regarded as either significant or beautiful. *A propos* of both Category 1 and Category 2, I notice that Rimbaud finds it necessary to say three times, "I alone hold the key to this savage parade," so I conclude

that it is just possible that these observations do mean something and, conceivably, something important, but that Rimbaud is determined not to let us know what it is. He wants to keep the secret to himself. Then, why write *Les Illuminations*?

Category 3: "It is a violent Paradise of mad grimaces . . . Chinese, Hottentots, gipsies, simpletons, hyænas, Molochs, old insanities, sinister demons, they alternate popular or maternal tricks with bestial poses and caresses."

This means something all right; and what it means, is, I think, the contents of the unconscious. The unconscious, I suppose, exists, although, for my part, I feel the less we know about it, the better. But ever since Freud took the lid off, we have been vying with one another in our endeavours to dive into the cesspool and see what titbits we can bring up to the surface. The titbits may conceivably be useful in a psycho-analyst's consulting-room, but why should it be supposed that they constitute suitable material for art? For this, in very truth, is what Plato called the unreasoning part of the soul, the part which, he held, should be in subjection to the reasoning part. Plato proposed that artists should be turned out of his ideal city, precisely because they appealed to the unreasoning elements in the soul. I have been brought up to think that Plato is wrong in this, since there is little doubt that he included among the unreasoning, and, therefore, undesirable elements of artistic appeal, romantic poetry and most tragic drama; little doubt that he would have included the *Apassionata* Sonata. But reading Rimbaud's poetry, listening to the music that so admirably expressed it, I felt that for the first time I saw Plato's point; for, although I had doubts about my estimate of the poetry—I am obtuse where poetry is concerned and hesitant and humble in my judgments—I had none about the music. Expressive, yes, but—the third article of my æsthetic faith¹ insists

¹ See p. 71.

beautiful, were disagreeable, because they were utterly unexpected and not led up to by anything. Gaiety and grief and despair and tenderness and triumph followed one another without any connection, like the emotions of a madman. And those emotions, like a madman's, sprang up quite unexpectedly. During the whole of the performance Levin felt like a deaf man watching people dancing, and was in a state of complete bewilderment when the fantasia was over, and felt a great weariness from the fruitless strain on his attention."

Yes, I thought, that is just how I felt.

Now, I should not venture upon so elaborate a criticism of a single work were it not that the feelings that it evoked were so familiar. Again and again, I was reminded of similar emotions aroused by contacts intermittently established with contemporary art during the twenty years between the two wars. These years were marked by a repudiation of all the traditional æsthetic disciplines. Negroes and jazz, the emanation of Negroes; the jungle and Ju-ju, the emanation of the jungle; the music of Stravinski and the pictures of the Surrealists, were acclaimed just because they were *not* in any classical tradition, because they did *not* embody the traditional æsthetic virtues of clarity and poise and beauty of form.

I call to mind a statement of æsthetic belief by a certain M. Breton "in the higher reality of certain forms of association hitherto neglected in the omnipotence of dreaming, in the unbiased play of thought." To this unexplored territory he welcomed artists and creative writers, maintaining that here was the source of all true art. "Artists and creative writers" were not slow to accept the invitation. They gave us poems whose exploration of the vague territories of the sublimable issued *via* a stream of unconscious association in phrases and rhythms that derived their meaning, if any, from the forgotten past and apparently made their appearance on the poet's writing paper as unaccountably as spirit messages, which, indeed, they often resembled. Salvador Dali

upon the question—what was it that was expressed? Clearly the urges and impulses of the human unconscious, urges and impulses that were less feeling than the raw material of feeling, without form or shape, direction or purpose. To express these, a series of jets or spurts of sound were emitted by the instruments of the orchestra, for all the world as if the composer were engaged in drawing off a successively recurring head of musical steam. There seemed to be no reason why any of these jettings of sound should begin or why, having begun, they should ever stop. Some were harsh, discordant, alarming; others of an indescribably cloying sweetness, as with ever increasing bathos the notes wound slowly up and down the diatonic scale.

All this could justly be described as moving; emotion indubitably was stirred; incomprehensible feelings for indescribable objects were evoked, evoked, it seemed, from their lurking places in the dim recesses of one's being.

But the chief effect was one of strain. Desperately the mind clutched at some structure of form to which to cling, sought for some thread of theme to guide it through the maze of sound, some recurrent motif on which to come to rest. But—I speak, of course, only for myself—clutched and sought in vain. Yet, perhaps not only for myself, for presently there came into my mind the memory of Levin's feelings in *Anna Karenina* while listening to "the fantasia of King Lear"—composer unspecified—at a fashionable Petersburg concert.

Returning home, I looked up the passage and read:

"But the more he listened to the fantasia . . . the further he felt from forming any definite opinion of it. There was, as it were, a continual beginning, a preparation of the musical expression of some feeling, but it fell to pieces again directly, breaking into new musical motifs, or simply nothing but the whims of the composer, exceedingly complex but disconnected sounds. And these fragmentary musical expressions, though sometimes

offered us pictures in which, against a predominating background of grand pianos, the skulls of animals, entrails, foetuses, and alarmingly distorted human faces jostled one another in their efforts to portray the enigmatic pulsings of the subliminal self. D. H. Lawrence, I suppose, is the most articulate exponent of this doctrine. His impatience with civilisation led him to find the perfect type of humanity in men in whom the intellect was demonstrably subordinate to the stomach, the genitals and the solar plexus. The perfect Lawrencian man has subjected his intellect to these fundamental organs and to the psychological growths which are rooted in them; indeed, it is not too much to say that his intellect is literally in his guts. This, at least, seems to be the meaning of those lyrical passages in which Lawrence raves over a dusky "abdomen where the great blood stream surges in the dark and surges in its own generic experience . . . it is the dark blood falling back from the mind, from sight and speech and knowing, back to the great central source where is rest and unspeakable renewal." Abjuring as artificial reason and the life of the intellect, subsiding into "the great blood stream which surges in the dark" of the abdomen and the genitals, man renews his being and becomes one with the ultimate reality of things.

All this seems to me highly undesirable. But to say that something is undesirable in art is dangerous, for the question immediately arises, why undesirable? To feel shocked—for that, not to put too fine a point on it, is, I suppose, what happened to me at the concert—is quite a harmless form of self-indulgence. But the feeling does not afford a satisfactory criterion for the estimation of æsthetic worth. Suppose, after all—something which is at once more simple and more plausible—suppose I have a blind spot. For, if I am pressed to give a reason for my conviction of æsthetic undesirability, I can only say with Plato that work like Rimbaud's poetry and the music which Britten has written to it diminishes the power of

the reasoning by feeding the unreasoning part of the soul. At the beginning of the century Sorel and Bergson began a revolt against reason and the tides of unreason have been rising ever since until they threaten to-day to engulf Europe. That the æsthetic movement which these works exemplify, though it is certainly not the initial cause, is a fitting expression of the unreasoning mind of a diseased generation and that, as appetite grows with what it feeds on, it intensifies, by expressing, the tendencies from which it springs and the condition which it reflects—of these things I am convinced. I cannot resist the temptation to add that the experience of hearing *Illuminations* has only served to strengthen my adherence to certain articles of faith which constitute my æsthetic credo. By describing them as articles of faith, I am carefully leaving open the question whether they are only merely dogmas of private preference or whether, as I hope and believe, they are also principles of æsthetic worth.

Let me try to say what they are.

Articles of Æsthetic Faith

First, then, in art I value the classical virtues of lucidity, poise, elegance, proportion, balance; I subscribe, in fact, to the eighteenth-century ideals of good sense, good taste, moderation and reason. Though the concept of lucidity is most obviously applicable to literature, I think that it has meaning in relation to painting, sculpture and music; to be clear is always a merit, and clarity is one of the major elements of form. The adoption of a traditional art form, the heroic couplet, for example, the sonnet or the fugue, assists the manifestation of these virtues by serving as a mould to receive and to canalise the outpourings of the spirit. The mould imposes the discipline of form; lacking a channel, the waters of the spirit are apt to spread, thus wasting energy and losing direction. As Nietzsche puts it, "the singular fact remains, however, that everything of the nature of freedom, elegance, boldness, dance and masterly certainty, which exists or

has existed, whether it be in thought itself, or in administration or in speaking and persuading, in art just as in conduct, has only developed by means of the tyranny of arbitrary law. The essential thing is . . . that there should be long obedience in the same direction; there thereby results and has always resulted in the long run, something which has made life worth living; for instance, virtue, art, music, dancing, reason, spirituality. . . . This tyranny, this arbitrariness, this severe and magnificent stupidity has educated the spirit."

I am not saying that the mould may not and should not be broken. Every original genius breaks it because its boundaries cannot contain the torrent of his inspiration. (It would be nonsense to criticise *Wuthering Heights* because it departs from the form of the eighteenth-century novel, or Schubert's A Major Sonata because it exceeds the limits of form and outruns the scale of emotion observed by Haydn.) But those who venture to depart from it should do so only with the greatest circumspection, and should it turn out that they are not geniuses after all, they will be well advised to return to its sheltering confines with as much expedition as they can contrive.

Secondly, the primary object of words is to express meaning; words, in fact, are symbols of meaning. But that the meaning which they symbolise should *itself* symbolise some other meaning is always a tiresome and usually a needless complexity. Hence, what is called Symbolism in art should be viewed with suspicion and approached with caution. For Symbolism apparently entails that an expression *A* should be considered and treated not on merits as a thing in itself, but as a symbol of, or indication of, or evocation of, or signpost to something else—namely *B*. Now either the writer or the artist knows *B* or he does not. If he does know *B*, why not say it or represent it and have done with it? If he does not, it is obvious that *A* cannot be known to symbolise *B*, for an image cannot serve its function as an image,

unless one knows the original which it images. Of course, *B* may be ineffable. In that case it is better left alone. If Mr. —, says Dr. Johnson somewhere, speaking of a metaphysical poet, has experienced the unutterable, Mr. — will do well not to try and utter it.

Thirdly, the expression of emotion is not a good in itself. Whether it is good or not depends upon the matter of the emotion which is expressed. If a man is being tortured, he screams, and the scream is a vivid, direct and, maybe, a full and adequate expression of his emotion. The fact does not, however, I submit, turn the act of screaming with pain into art, nor is it to be taken for granted that the emotions which the screaming expresses are a fit subject for art merely because the scream expresses them adequately. As with the emotions of intense physical pain, so with those of love. To quote Dr. Johnson again, "poetry has not often been worse employed than in dignifying the amorous fury of a raving girl."

Fourthly, what confers value upon a work of art is not its ability to express or to communicate emotion, but its beauty. The difference between a good picture and a bad one, as between good music and bad, resolves itself in the last resort, into nothing more abstruse than the fact that the first is beautiful and the second is not. Beauty is indefinable; it can be apprehended but not described. Good taste consists in the ability to perceive beauty when it is present and not to misperceive it when it is absent. Good taste can be trained and developed by the continuous intercourse of the spirit with things that are beautiful. Training, indeed, is usually necessary since good taste is acquired and not instinctive. Again to quote the eighteenth century—this time Sir Joshua Reynolds—"Taste does not come by chance of nature; it is a long and laborious process to acquire it; it is the lowest style only of arts, whether of painting or music that may be said in the vulgar sense to be naturally pleasing."

I have phrased these articles of faith in the language appropriate to the visual and musical arts. The same principles apply in a modified degree to literature and poetry, but their application is confused by the fact that literature and poetry consist of words and the primary function of words is, as I have pointed out, to express meaning. That a poem should be beautiful is clearly an excellence, but is far from being its sole excellence; the *primary* excellence of poetry consists in its ability to express meaning and convey emotion. But everything here—see my third principle—depends upon the *quality* of the meaning, the nature of the emotion expressed.

The validity of these principles appeared to me to receive illustration from the experience of hearing Benjamin Britten's music and, more particularly, that of the first of them which insists upon the necessity of form to give strength and direction to the artist's inspiration, as a strut strengthens and directs a feeble or a twisted limb. Listening to this music—I had the same feeling when I later heard *Peter Grimes*—confirmed my faith. Yet the recurrence of the word "faith"—for this, I see, is its second appearance in this entry—pulls me up short in my thinking, so that I am constrained to stop and think. For the word "faith" has a familiar, nay an ominous ring. For suppose that its meaning is more correctly rendered by the word "prejudice!"

And so I feel bound to put to myself the question, am I in fact, the victim of gross prejudice? The reflection that a number of human beings for whom I have the profoundest respect, Voltaire, for example, or Jane Austen or Haydn, would almost certainly have agreed with me about this music, while it mitigates, does not wholly allay the suspicion, for they, it may be said, would have moved with the times.

Moreover, it is fair to add, the audience loved it. When the last pulse of "Illuminated" music had throbbed away, it rose to its feet and cheered. No doubt the music had been admirably sung by handsome Mr. Peers; no doubt

Mr. Britten himself had been present to conduct and Mr. Britten is on the crest of the wave of contemporary popularity. Yet these circumstances while, no doubt, they accounted for the enthusiasm of most of the women, did not, I felt, cover all the ground. Some of the audience really liked the work for itself and among them were those who, I had been led to suppose, knew musically "what was what." And so, I come back to the question I put to myself before, "Have I a blind spot, or is it perhaps just possible that the whole thing is a gigantic æsthetic swindle?" (I can't help remembering Addison's praise of Nicolini and the eighteenth-century rage for eunuchal male sopranos.) Either hypothesis is alarming. The realisation that you have a blind spot, that a whole realm of æsthetic delight is closed to you, cannot but bring distress. But scarcely less distressing is the conviction that a whole contemporary musical fashion is an aberrant disease. It is in the hope of setting my own mind to rest in the matter of this distressing dilemma that I have put all this into my diary. Foolishly, I suppose, because now that it is done, I feel more convinced that I am right, that is to say, more confirmed in my "prejudice" than before. Hence, it may be that the main, perhaps the only effect, of this entry has been to increase the complacency of the author, while deepening the irritation of the reader.

December 13th, 1946

BUXTON AUDIENCE

“WHAT,” I WAS ASKED to-night, “do you think of Buxton?”

I arrived in the dark, dined at a hotel, addressed an audience and left—again in the dark—so, for me, Buxton means, in effect, an hotel and an audience.

Of the hotel there is little to be said. I had a reasonably good dinner—such a dinner as I might have had in any one of hundred good class English hotels; that is to say, it tasted almost exactly like any other dinner—in a private room in pleasant company.

What of the audience? But first, what, from the point of view of a lecturer, is the ideal audience? It should, I suggest, satisfy two conditions.

First, it should be mainly composed of men.

I say this because a lecturer wants to feel his audience; he wants, in particular, the feeling not only of giving something out to them, but of receiving something back from them. Of this he can, of course, most easily be assured, if he hears his audience, hears their laughter, hears their occasional applause, hears their murmurs of approbation, hears, even, their murmurs of disapprobation.

Now women on the whole don't laugh in public when the lights are up—or they laugh very little.

A genteel titter is the most that you will get from them. This is, I suppose, first, because they are always a little apprehensive in public and terribly afraid of giving themselves away by laughing vulgarly or laughing in the wrong place; partly, because they think any overt expression of their feelings unladylike. This, of course, only applies to public expressions of feeling; in private they express themselves with embarrassing intensity and often at inordinate length.

The audience, secondly, should be young, should, that is to say, be on the right side of forty.

The old, both men and women, when they are not deaf are apt to be either indifferent or downright disapproving.

Old men, in particular, have hermetically sealed minds; minds which are not empty, but full, as full, in fact, as billiard balls, into which no new thought or idea can find space to effect an entry—I suppose, by the way, that we are most of us incapable of taking in any new ideas after the age of forty—with the result that, whatever the lecturer says, either they think they know it already, in which case they are contemptuously indifferent, or that they met it, weighed it and found it out long ago and know better now, in which case they are antipathetic.

Now, the Buxton audience failed by both these criteria.

It was mainly—two-thirds, I calculated—female, and its age average was in the neighbourhood of fifty.

There they sat, row after row, of decorous, well-dressed, elderly parties absorbing like sponges and giving back absolutely nothing.

Sallies which elsewhere would have produced a roar of laughter, evoked at most an ashamed titter; points or periods which I have known on other occasions to get their round of applause—such a relief to the lecturer, that applause; he can stop talking, take a sip of water and look at his notes—fell like stones into the deep well of my audience's silence.

As a result of all this, I felt at the end of the lecture as drained of energy as a sucked orange.

Instead of responding to me with the rebound of a coiled spring, my audience had just soaked me up like blotting paper. Why, I wondered, did they come? Partly, no doubt, to see somebody whose voice they had heard and whose name they knew—they were engaged, in fact, in celebrity hunting. Partly because lecture going has become something of a social rite.

In America one lectures to vast regiments of women,

and looks down from the platform upon a sea of perfectly Marcelled heads crowning faces of uncomprehending solemnity, women who attend—much as we used to attend Church in the nineteenth century—to see and to be seen, to show off their dresses, to observe their neighbours and to assure both themselves and their neighbours that they know the right thing to do and are doing it; attend also to make public display of the fact that they have both the money and the leisure to do it. Lecture-attending is, in fact, a hallmark of economic respectability.

I gathered something of the same impression from the polite greetings and interchanges of social amenities among my Buxton audience.

Partly, I suppose, because they had nothing better to do. . . .

The fact of the matter is that people don't die as they used to, or, more precisely, they don't die when they used to.

For the first time almost in human history people go on living after the business of mating and bringing up a family and establishing a position and making a career is over and done with, living, especially if they are women, for another couple of decades, living to no end or purpose and without a ghost of a notion how to occupy themselves.

For such the war was a godsend. It gave them something to do and a sense of self-importance. Now, that is over, they are reverting to their chronic condition of having nothing to do; or, rather, nothing better to do than to be seen at lectures which don't interest them.

Buxton, I suppose, like Bath and Matlock and Cheltenham and other Spas is full of such people.

It is so healthy that it has a high death rate, since old people go there hoping to prolong their lives and at last—at very long last—they die there. Meanwhile, God help them, they try to make their existence supportable by attending lectures given by people like myself.

But lest the reader be inclined to take all this too seriously, I venture to comfort him and reprove myself with the assurance of the Mayor of Buxton that "whenever we listen to Dr. Joad, we are aware of the mischievous sprite as well as of the earnest thinker."

February 10th, 1947

THE COLD: THE DISILLUSION OF WINTER SPORTS.
MECHANICS AND THEIR CIVILISATION

The Cold

THE COLD! I must write of it now. Frost, snow, thaw for a few hours, more snow and then frost again, turning the streaming roads into sheets of ice. I have nothing new to say about it; yet how I hate it, hate it more every year I live. But that is not new either, for the old, whose blood runs thin and slow, always hate the cold and usually make a point of dying in it, a procedure which I shall probably adopt myself.

When I was a boy, I enjoyed the winter. I was mad for skating, used to pray for the frost to hold and, when it did, would lie awake all night excited with the prospect of the skating on the morrow. I learnt early to do an outside edge and on the strength of it saw myself a professional skater. It was about the same time that I scored a twenty break on a small billiard table and conceived the ambition to be a professional billiard player.

I liked snow and though I early found the process of snowman-making unduly static, threw my snowballs and tobogganed with the rest; in fact, better than most of the rest, because I had a good circulation and scarcely felt the cold.

This winter-loving habit lasted up to and well beyond Oxford. It began to wear thin when I came first to London. London is probably the most difficult place in the country to skate in, or rather to skate from. The authorities won't allow you to skate on the inland waters of London, the Serpentine or the Hampstead ponds, until the ice attains a prodigious degree of thickness rarely achieved in these latitudes. By the time you do get on to it, the surface is so littered with the broken ice, frozen

snow, stones, sticks, cans and bottles, that it has accumulated during its long vacancy that even if the surging crowds did not hustle the aspiring figure skater off his edges, the state of the ice would make it wellnigh impossible to get on to them. So one had to go out of London for one's skating, to the Welsh Harp, it might be, or to Ruislip Reservoir. Oh, those long slow cross-suburban London journeys, the dreary, draughty platforms, the cracking cold! One would spend two hours at least on the job of getting there only, as often as not, to find notices affirming that the ice was unsafe when one arrived. Or a thaw would have set in. . . . The trouble is and always has been that there is no method of finding out in advance. There is nobody to telephone to at Ruislip Reservoir, the post-mistress does not know and the newspapers, so up-to-date with news that nobody wants to read, are always hopelessly behindhand with reports on the state of the ice. Moreover, any event served in those days as a pretext for prohibiting skating; the death of a member of the Royal family, or of the owner of the estate, or even the fact of its being Sunday—all in my experience have been thought adequate reasons for depriving the skater of his delight. My ardour for winter sports having been damped by several years of this sort of thing, I went to Switzerland to rekindle it.

The Disillusion of Winter Sports

I remember now the shock of disillusion. I had expected to be suffused with a great surge of energy and excitement; most of the time I was bored and humiliated. I had thought to take to ski-ing as a duck to water; I discovered that I was heavy and clumsy; that I learnt the simplest turns with the greatest difficulty, hurt myself whenever I fell down, found the snow cold and disagreeable, and got up with an enormous and exhausting expenditure of effort. Before a few days had passed—and, so long does a myth take to die, this happened to me year after year for five years—I had

given up the disagreeable struggle with the snow and subsided on to the pond, resolved to compensate for my failure as a skier by success as a skater.

And so, afternoon after weary afternoon, I used to make the round of the pond in front of the hotel with the other old gents and ladies. Drearily and without gusto I practised my edges and turns like a pianist practising his scales; familiarly, I greeted the circling acquaintances who, once seen, were never remembered, with pseudo-hearty conversation, and unconvincingly—for I was nearly as much too old for them as I was for the ski-ing—pursued the girls. It was exactly like walking up and down the promenade at a sea-side resort or taking the waters of a Spa. I never even got the Bronze Medal to which I so pertinaciously aspired. . . .

Nor was this the end of my disillusion. I had thought to be overwhelmed by the grandeur of the scenery. And so I was at first. But I have never known scenery with any pretensions to notice pall so quickly as that of the Swiss mountains in winter. The peaks, no doubt, are magnificent but they are too large for the eye to take in and remain what in effect they are, vast hulks of unmeaning matter. The skyline is jagged and non-significant; the contours are not gentle but abrupt; the sky is either an unvarying blue or veiled in snow, and for colour there is only a monochrome of black and white. The bridge in the evening is only one degree less boring than the dancing. . . .

Before half my holiday is over, I have come scuttling home in a frenzy of nostalgia for the soft contours, the gentle rains, the fogs and drizzles and dirty greens of an English January. And this I have done not once but five times. All this is only a long-winded way of saying that when I went to winter sports, I was already too old for them, this, indeed, being one of the first intimations that came to me that I was beginning to age.

Now, it was these abortive attempts at winter sporting in Switzerland that first set my early preference for

winter swaying in the balance. To-day, the balance has been tilted decisively against winter. As I said at the beginning, I now hate the cold; I hate frost and, above all, I hate snow. Frost and snow stop me from doing all the things I enjoy doing. I cannot walk, hack, hunt, play tennis, play hockey, dig or muck about in the garden.

In the imperfectly heated house one feels miserably cold. The thin, slow-running blood of the ageing requires exercise to brisk it up, and as all one's accustomed exercises are denied, one never gets properly warmed, but sits crouched over the fire complaining of draughts, a miserable old clod of ailments and shivers.

Mechanics and their Civilisation

And what a fire! For this week the coal crisis has broken out on us. The gas fire burns so low and dim that it would take ten minutes to boil an egg, if there were an egg to boil; the electric fire fails to function; the geyser refuses to supply even lukewarm water—it must be weeks since anybody I know in London had a hot bath—and although I have a coal fire in the library, the coal is so small and dusty—it is what we used to call “slack”—that only by courtesy can it be termed a fire at all. Oh, the miseries of London life! In London, I tell myself, one is more uncomfortable than anywhere else because here our vaunted civilisation has reached its apogee and has already begun to stultify itself. This objurgation is, I suppose, at bottom only a rationalised expression of my hatred of machines. I cannot understand them or manage them, and consequently feel humiliated by them as also by the machine-men who know about them. The rationalisation runs as follows: machines were never goods in themselves; they were good only as instruments and as instruments they might have conferred, they did, in fact, confer benefits upon man's life by saving him from dull and drudging work. But this potential benefit has been cancelled by our folly in treating what are essentially means as ends. Take cars, for example. A hundred years

ago the man who wanted to live away from his work in the town would walk the four or five miles from home to office and arrive glowing and hearty from his exercise. The car arrived and the tube. "How much quicker we can travel," people said; "how much further, then, we can go into the country and still get to the office in time. We will now live twenty miles from the office and modern transport will make light of the distance." And so it did make light of it to such effect that everybody else made the same discovery and the towns rapidly grew out to the full radius of the newly extended area of accessibility, with the result that we take as long over our journeys as our grandfathers, but instead of arriving hale and hearty from our exercise, we turn up at the office all liver and no legs after a nerve racking drive in the car, or blinking like owls at the sunlight after burrowing like moles beneath the earth. Thus, the potential benefit which the car might have conferred has been cancelled by our misuse of the instrument which might have conferred it.

Moreover, in those places where civilisation has advanced furthest, for example, in the centre of London, there are so many petrol driven machines, both public and private, that there speed is already less than that of the horse bus and in some cases is less than that of the foot passenger.

It was only a few days ago that I was present at the annual dinner of a transport workers' organisation. It was with an air of great satisfaction that in his after dinner speech a transport official told us that he thought that he might safely say --he was choosing his words with care-- that a journey across London "does not take appreciably longer now than it did in the days of the horse bus."

But although machines are no longer an advantage, they have become a necessity since they have enabled us to build a civilisation in which we can no longer get on without them. Thus, London has grown so big that

living miles away from our work is no longer a matter of choice but of necessity, so that we must perforce travel by train or bus or tube. Many houses have no grates to burn and no cellars to hold coal; hence, we *have* to use gas or electricity. In other words, we are dependent upon machines. Now this is the very moment—and here comes the complaint which I have been rationalising for the last two pages—which the machines choose to let us down. We have been taught to warm ourselves by gas and electricity, but there is little of the first and none of the second; to turn for our water to the geyser, and the water from the geyser is lukewarm; to speak to one another by telephone, only to find, if we are Londoners, that the telephone frequently won't work; to reach our destination by car, but in this weather the car won't start. Our pipes freeze and burst and freeze and burst again because our plumbers don't know where to place them. We cannot keep ourselves warm in winter because the builders don't think it necessary to equip our houses with central heating, or cool in summer because they haven't the wit to contrive those half in and half out of doors structures, verandahs, porticos, cloisters and the like, which make existence abroad in hot weather so delightful.

Some part of all this is no doubt due to the war; some, but not all. Even before the war one was warmer in the houses of cold countries such as Canada and Finland, Sweden and Russia, cooler in the houses of hot countries such as Italy or the south of France, than one ever is at home. And in the cold countries the pipes did not burst. Why not? Because they ran up and down inside and not outside the walls. Why don't the pipes run up and down inside the walls in England? Answer, because the doctors and sanitary men won't have them there? Why not? Because they are unhealthy—lavatory pipes, you know, carry excrement and God knows what other filth! Why, then, aren't they unhealthy in Canada and Sweden? I don't know. Yet when all allowance is made

for the imbecile prohibitions of our doctors and sanitary men, one is tempted to wonder whether our technical men really know how to do their stuff. We are, I repeat, become wholly dependent on machines and then they let us down. Yet, on reflection, I suppose I ought in common justice to the machines to admit that it is the men who make and serve them, the technical men, the men who know how things work, the men who tinker with bits of metal, the men who are for ever taking radio sets and motor cycles to pieces, the men who talk to you in incomprehensible jargon and take it for granted that you will understand them—for they cannot just come and do their jobs and be quick about it; they insist on boring you with unintelligible discourses on just *what* is wrong and how they propose to put it right; or, more often, why they cannot put it right because they have not got this, that or the other, or because the voltage or current or screw thread or what not is different, on the assumption that you really want to know about their squalid pursuits, instead of being concerned, as of course you are, merely that they should do the job and go away, as if any sensible man wanted to know how machines work—the men, in short, who are the characteristic men of our time, the distinctive heroes of our age, the beau ideals of every schoolboy, partly because they are schoolboys themselves being, in fact, a race of permanently arrested adolescents—I ought, I say, in common justice to admit that it is *they* rather than the machines who let us down, since they don't, when it comes to the point, know how to do their stuff.

A hundred years ago, I suppose, ours were the best of their kind. We had taken the lead in the industrial revolution and the quality of our goods, including our machines and machine made-goods, was the highest in the world. Then other peoples, the Germans and the Americans, began to overhaul us. Buttressed by our empire, cushioned by our invisible exports we rested on our oars complacently ignoring the facts not only that

we were being caught up but that we were falling behind. And now our technical chaps have manifestly fallen behind. They don't build such good houses, construct such efficient telephone exchanges, contrive such elaborate and powerful machines, turn out such efficient and foolproof cars as the Americans and the Germans, the Swiss and the Swedes. Hence, in fact, our present troubles! And yet how they vaunt themselves and give themselves airs and look down their noses at people like me because we don't understand their jargon, don't know how their machines work and can't use our fingers to turn a nut or a screw or to plug a hole, or to repair the faults which *their* inefficiency has fathered upon us. All of which brings me back to the stultification of our civilisation. For I now put it on record that the further one is removed from the great towns, removed, that is to say, from the places in which the distinctive features of our civilisation are exhibited in their clearest manifestations, its characteristic goods in the highest pitch of their development, the more comfortable one is. For years it has come to be accepted among us that the quiet of the country is the balm of the spirit. By this we have meant that, living in the country, one was spared the thousand and one irritations and frustrations of life in London; that the machinery of life was simpler and life itself less exacting, so that the mind was not cluttered by the clinker and ash of its own functioning, or the spirit ruffled by a round of trivial cares and episodic pleasures. We have meant, in short, that living in the country one was a serener and a better-tempered person. But for some weeks past the country has scored not merely in terms of spiritual but also of purely physical well-being. This, indeed, had long been partially true. Over years we have grown accustomed to recognise that country produce is superior to that which is provided by civilisation. The fruit and vegetables one grew for oneself were better than one bought in the shops; the jam that one made at home was better than the jam which was turned

out by the factory and purchased at the grocer's; home-made cakes were better than manufactured cakes and so on. But, since the war, the superiority of the country product has extended over nearly the whole range of the material adjuncts of living. Food in the country is not so dependent as it is in towns upon the exigencies of transport and so is less liable to run short when there is fog, frost or snow. Since the war it has been easier to telephone in the country. Since the war people in country shops serve one more efficiently and more good-temperedly, and, since this winter hardened upon us, I must now add that the country provides more light, more heat and, consequently, more hot water than the towns.

As I write here on the farm we are snow bound or, rather, ice bound, for the snow has melted and frozen again. Nevertheless, I am warm for there is no electricity or gas to go bad on me, and there are coal and wood for a fire. I am well fed, since the farm gives milk and butter and there are a few chickens. I am well lit, since there is paraffin and oil for the lamps, and the boiler gives me a hot bath when I want it.

February 15th, 1947

THE COLD: NEED FOR EXERCISE. HORRORS OF
SNOW-WALKING AND TOBOGGANING

Need for Exercise

THE COLD STILL GOES ON and I still hate it. No use for me to inform myself that I am getting old, don't need exercise as much as I did and enjoy my games less than I did; that when engaged in physical activities I get less fun out of them and that the fun which I do get lasts for a shorter time; that I walk five miles instead of ten and that my period of walking is a couple of hours instead of four or six; that my tennis is senile, that at hockey I am practically stationary, and that I am further become so unfitted for these games which I still insist on playing that after Saturday afternoon tennis and Sunday afternoon hockey I am a brutalised inhuman clod of fatigue. All this is, no doubt, true; nevertheless, exercise of some kind I must still have, if I am to bear myself with even tolerable equanimity.

On each of the last four Sundays the hockey ground has been covered with snow; it is five Sundays, then, since I have played hockey. By the same token, it is five Saturday afternoons since I played tennis. Week after week I go optimistically to the farm hoping to ride or saw or dig or to get some exercise no matter what. But one cannot ride on the roads which are covered with frozen snow, interspersed with ruts of ice upon which the horses slip and stumble, or in the fields where the snow is covered with a treacherous top crust through which the horse's hooves sink at every step. It is no use trying to shoot; no living thing is to be seen except flocks of pigeons on the sprouts and cabbages which poke forlornly up out of the snow, and they are up and away long before you can get near them.

As for walking, it is a weariness to the flesh. It isn't merely that the effort of putting one's feet down into and lifting them up out of the snow is exhausting and the constant slipping on the frozen surface exasperating. What really matters is that there is nothing to walk *for*. When I go walking I am sensitive—though usually I don't know it—to half a dozen different influences, all of which contribute to my enjoyment. There are obvious joys like spring flowers, great trees or a sudden view; there are less obvious ones like the contour lines of a gentle rise, a harmony or contrast of colours, a changing sky, the rising smells as one's feet rustle in leaves or, what is perhaps above and beyond all these yet is also compounded of all, the impalpable, indefinable influence of the myriad happenings and comings and goings of things and creatures which are all about one.

Horrors of Snow-walking and Tobogganing

Now all this commerce of Nature's is suspended. There are no colours, no smells, no leaves, no bird life. Gone is the delicate tracery of twigs against a darkling or a brightening sky, for the outline of the trees has disappeared under a blanket of snow and the sky neither darkens nor brightens, but remains a uniform, unvarying ceiling of grey cloud. The contours have been flattened out.

Thus, there is nothing to catch the eye, to please the ear, or to delight any sense. Again and again I have "gone for a walk"—so hard have I found it to believe that this gentle, humdrum pleasure, this eternal standby of one's life, the country walk, had let me down—only to come back tired and bored. I have already discoursed upon the difficulties of skating in London and here in the country the nearest stretch of water is some miles away. No doubt, if I felt keen I should travel the miles.

But we are surrounded by steep slopes, deep in snow, ideal for tobogganing. So, "why not toboggan?" they said.

I tobogganed, and hated it! It is years since I

decided to give up tobogganing, the first and only sport that I have as yet deliberately and finally abandoned—I had, I remember, fallen out of a toboggan which had turned over on top of me and cracked a rib—but I had got very little pleasure out of it even before the rib cracked and I vowed never to do it again.

But now, since there was nothing else to do, I broke my vow and did it again. The day was cold, bleak and sunless; the snow was soft but it was also wet and dragging the toboggan up the slope seemed a labour of Hercules. So did the staying of it with the feet while one got on to it, lest it should start down the hill before one wanted it to, which in the end it almost always did.

With what seemed to me a terrifying velocity we hurtled uncontrollably down the slope. What, I wondered, would happen at the bottom? I need not have wondered, for long before the bottom was reached we overturned. I was not hurt, but I suffered extreme discomfort. There was snow on my face, snow in my mouth, snow up my sleeves, snow down my trousers; presently the snow began to melt.

Again and again I essayed the slope. Others more skilled than I steered the toboggan to the bottom; again and again I turned over, turned over because I was heavy and clumsy and had no skill and was old, too old, I assured myself, as I dragged the beastly thing up the hill admonishing myself that I would do it just once more, just to show them that I was not to be outdone by a parcel of laughing girls, too old to go tobogganing. “Whizz—flash—one mile walkee!” said the Chinaman who was asked what he thought of tobogganing. I endorsed the Chinaman’s description and swore that no demand for exercise, however urgent, would make me do the thing again. Tobogganing is emphatically for the young.

Yet without exercise I grow irritable, moody and cross. Exercise, I have always maintained, keeps the psychoanalyst from the door. Now I begin to feel the need of

him. For, without exercise what pleasures are there? Eating and drinking and making love? I do my best, but too much eating and drinking are bad for me—I am fat enough already, feel shame at the grossness of my body and fear lest it should grow grosser—and I am too old to do much loving.

Music? That is indeed a stand-by. I have come to associate music with frosty weather because, unable to do anything else on a Saturday or Sunday afternoon, I am driven to go to concerts. And very nice, too, except that the concert one wants to hear never seems to coincide with the frosty afternoon when one is driven by lack of any decent alternative to go in quest of music. Besides music never seems so attractive when one has not got to make sacrifices in order to hear it, when one hears it, in fact, just because there is nothing better to do. I suppose that music resents being treated as a stand-by, a second-best, to be resorted to when the best isn't available and holds back some part of what it has to give. Similarly with work. "Now," I say to myself, "is the time to go to ground, sit snug and read and write—read the books I never have time for, write up the odds and ends that always get left behind amid the flurry of lectures to prepare, articles to write, books to review, proofs to correct, revisions to make, reports to draw up—write, for example, this diary.

And yet never have the reading and the writing gone so heavily as now. I can write well enough when there are hundreds of other things that I ought to be doing, or want to do; when I have to snatch time for writing, like a brand from my too eagerly burning life and when, therefore, I have to write against time. But now, when there is time and enough for writing, the call to write comes faintly and the pleasure in it stales. So, too, with reading. I suppose I have got so used to living and working on my intellectual nerves, writing in railway trains, or on platforms while waiting for them, on buses, in lecture rooms or at the luncheon table, that I

cannot now bring myself to do it without the accustomed stimulus of unsuitable surroundings, or the pressing spur of time to give it savour and urgency, just as a man who is used to condiments and sauces cannot stand plain food.

So I go on with the reading and writing because after all I must do something, but I have never enjoyed them less.

February 18th, 1947

THE COLD: BERTRAND RUSSELL AT THE ARISTOTELIAN
SOCIETY. EYE-MEETING AND NOT-MEETING

Bertrand Russell at the Aristotelian Society

THE COLD STILL GOES ON; indeed, it is colder than ever. Nor is there any prospect of relief. Eagerly we listen to the weather reports but none suggests a change. Meanwhile, there is a coal crisis and an electric light crisis and a gas crisis and the pipes have burst for the fourth time and one still cannot get a bath in London and the plumbers are all over the house explaining to you why they aren't doing and can't do the things they came to do.

Tired of frustration, I have at last succumbed to the conditions and settled down to work. For this change of morale, Bertrand Russell is, in part, responsible.

A few days ago I read a paper to the Aristotelian Society on his recently published *A History of Western Philosophy*. It wasn't a bad paper; in fact, it was as good as I could make it, for I was told that Russell himself was likely to come to the discussion, and this put me on my mettle.

I am afraid of Russell; at least I used to be. He is so much cleverer than I am that he makes me feel a fool—or used to. But, except on Brains Trusts, where I am so to speak playing on the home ground and feel fairly confident of my ability to take on all-comers, I had not crossed swords with Russell for years. Hence, I went to the meeting with mingled trepidation and defiance, telling myself that this time at least I wouldn't be put down, but knowing that I almost certainly should be. I tried to encourage myself by reminding myself that I was no longer a callow youth unversed in controversy but was an old hand with an experienced technique, that I had, indeed, acquired some reputation as a

dialectician, and that I had the prestige of Brains Trust success behind me. Moreover, some of the critical points that I had made in my paper seemed to me to be pretty strong.

Nevertheless, I went with trepidation, knowing only too well my weakness. This weakness I attributed to three things. First, there was my old subjection to Russell and the memory of the many occasions on which he had discomfited or nonplussed me in the past; secondly, there was my consciousness of his superior dialectical power, greater reputation and more vivid personality; thirdly, there was my respect, a respect amounting almost to reverence for one whose mind I held to be so powerfully original as by virtue of its pre-eminence alone to constitute its possessor a great man—not, that I don't think him great in other ways; and yet except in respect of the article of moral courage, I don't *know* that he is. This reverential respect which disposes me to listen with humility to what he has to say, induces me to think that I am wrong and that he is right, even when this is far from being certainly the case, and puts it wholly out of my power to be pert and contumacious in his presence, or to try to score purely dialectical points.

Knowing all these things it was, I repeat, with trepidation that I went to the meeting. In spite of the awful weather the room was packed with people, some of them my own students. Instead of diminishing, these increased my uneasiness. If my intellectual trousers, as was all too probable, were taken down, it was highly doubtful whether the subsequent exhibition of tutor-spanking would be good for discipline; moreover, I couldn't help remembering how often I had done it to them.

I read my paper in an assertive, rather challenging voice whose vigour, I hoped rather than believed, disguised its underlying nervousness. As I read, I could feel the kick going out of my sentences and the substance oozing from my arguments. Reasonable applause and

then the chairman asked Russell to comment! He commented mildly at first, then more trenchantly, charging me now with intellectual error, now with illogicality, now with inconsistency, now with a failure to understand his position, a failure which, he implied, must be due either to lack of patience and assiduity, or to not having kept myself up to date, or to sheer insufficiency of intellectual equipment.

I interrupted, challenged him, stood up to him as well as I could. It was humiliating how little ice I cut. In part my arguments, when it came to the point, lacked substance. When they had substance, my awe of Russell prevented me from putting them properly. When I tried to put them as well as I knew how, he put me off my stroke by well-timed interruptions, by a shake of the head, by a notable failure to cry *touché* when I thought that I had made an undeniable hit. "Oh," he would say, with a sort of contemptuous tolerance, "Oh, you think so? Oh, *do* you?" Then he began trailing red herrings, telling anecdotes and making philosophical jokes.

The audience, quite as conscious as ever I could be that Russell was a great man, who had come partly to revere and partly to be amused, roared with laughter. Finally, Russell brought the house down with a most diverting account of Leibniz's doctrine of "Compossibility." By this time everybody had forgotten me and my paper; they could think only of Russell. All eyes were turned to him; all questions addressed to him. What, they wanted to know, did he think of this? What did he mean by that? (Never did they want to know what I thought of this or meant by that!) Laughing, cracking his dry little jokes, telling his stories, dropping his epigrams and generally scintillating Russell had completely stolen the limelight. I looked at my students. All the dialectical tricks I had so often played on them they could now observe being played on me—not surprisingly, since had I not, after all, learnt them in the first instance at Russell's dialectical knee?

There was the disabling interrogation, "Now *what* do you mean by that?"; there was the even more disabling expulsion of breath, the long-drawn out "Oh" of pitying astonishment, "Oh is *that* what you mean?", when the flustered victim was at last delivered of his halting explanation, followed by "Oh, it had never occurred to me for a moment that you could have meant *that*," the implication being that "*that*" was so palpably absurd that nobody in his senses could have meant it or anything like it. "That" was then subjected to criticism which so riddled and withered it that the victim was left wondering how he could ever have thought anything so manifestly imbecile. Again, there was the non-committal "Oh! Do you think so?", as if it were a matter of surprise that anybody *could* think so. There was the disarmingly handsome avowal of error. "There," said Russell, on some point of manifest unimportance, "*there* I was wrong, completely wrong," gaining by this unreserved confession everybody's sympathy for fair-minded readiness to admit error, all this, of course, lending increased weight to his vigorous defence of his position on other criticised points of much greater importance. There was the hypocritical confession of a Socratic thick-headedness: "Now *that* I don't understand! Will you, please, explain it to me, so that I can grasp what it is that you are saying? . . ." And so on. . . .

After this had been going on for some time, I determined on a counter-attack. "I won't," I said to myself, "be put down any more. I will stand up to him. Yes, in spite of his immense prestige, in spite of his superior dialectical skill, in spite of the enfeebling effects of being put down by him so often in the past and of his remembrance and mine of the fact, in spite of his manifest popularity with the audience, I really will make a stand."

And, indeed, I might have succeeded if it had not been for Russell's eye. For you can't stand up to a man in discussion unless you can look fairly and squarely at him, unless, in fact, you can meet his eye. And when it

came to the point, I found, as I have found before, that I could not meet Russell's eye; not, at least, for more than a moment. I tried it and then had to avert my gaze to hide my embarrassed discomfiture.

Eye-meeting and Not-meeting

Now, I am not shifty-eyed and I can meet most people's eyes with composure. I am interested in the phenomenon of eye-meeting or not-meeting and consider that insufficient attention has been given to it. Is it quite simply that one's realisation of superior intellectual, or it may be, moral power or, even, of a more vivid and compelling personality quells and tames one, as the Long-livers in *Back to Methuselah* quell the Short-livers by a look? In Russell's case perhaps it is, but it is certainly not so in every case. There are some people who I know to be my equals; there are even some who I believe to be my inferiors, whose eyes I nevertheless cannot meet.

Again, if A. can't meet B.'s eyes, does it necessarily follow that B. cannot meet A.'s? Or does it at least sometimes happen that B. is unaware of and, therefore, undisturbed by A.'s discomfiture? I think this last possibility unlikely. It is extremely embarrassing not to be able to look people in the eye, especially if you happen to catch their eye by accident and find yourself driven to look hurriedly away, because you can't. If, as I suspect, this is equally embarrassing to them, it seems to me that compassion is needed for the plight of the chronic non-eye-meeter. Let me explain. Admitting that there may be a special degree of "allergy" between particular pairs of people, so that A. cannot meet B.'s eye, though he can meet C.'s, and B. can meet D.'s, though he cannot meet A.'s, there may yet be individuals for whom a quite exceptional number of their fellow men experience eye-meeting "allergy," so that they are continually coming into contact with people who cannot meet their eyes and whose eyes they themselves cannot meet. The

lives of such, if such there be, must be a continual series of embarrassments, as they go through their life continually making haphazard contacts with those whose eyes it disconcerts them to catch, and the owners of which they disconcert by catching. Are there, then, I wonder, such people? If so, why have they never been defined as a distinct type and written about? Another question! Can you, by the exercise of will, force yourself to meet the eye of someone whose glance makes you feel uncomfortable? Within limits, of course you can. Do you, then, show the effects of this will-exercise in your eye and is the person you are looking at aware of it and does his awareness of it, if it exists, make the contact more embarrassing both for him and for you than it would otherwise be? Answer, probably yes.

Returning to my own predicament, whatever the reason, I could not meet Russell's eye for long enough to stand up to him successfully and in the end withdrew, humiliated, from the fray. Questions! Was Russell aware of this? Does he produce this effect upon many people? If so, does he mind producing it?

Final question! Do I produce this effect upon many people while remaining unaware of it?

To put all this in a sentence, is my inability to meet Russell's eye a peculiar characteristic of mine or of his? If the characteristic is his, does he belong to a class of habitual eye-quenchers, producing upon all or most people the effect he produces upon me, or is it only I and a few like me who are unable to meet Russell's eye and can most people meet it easily? In this latter event, do I and the few like me belong to a special class of inveterate eye-avoiders?

March 6th, 1947

THE COLD: MISERY IN A TRAIN. COMPANY
AND A CONCERT

Misery in a Train

SIXTEEN MORE DAYS and the cold still goes on. We were promised a thaw; it began—when I went last week to Southsea to see my mother, the rain was falling in sheets—wavered and stopped.

First, there was more frost and the roads became sheets of ice upon which the cars slipped and skidded until they were stranded. As the rain came down it froze where it alighted, so that every tree, branch and twig, was cased in ice. Then came a fine day and the sun shining down from a steely blue sky was reflected multitudinously from every casing, so that the trees glittered like diamonds. When the sun set, a fine weather sunset, the drops turned red and every tree and bush glowed like a fire.

For my part, I admired these effects but felt no affection for them; they were non-English. They were not, that is to say, the effects which our constantly changing weather with its prevailing south-westerly winds makes peculiarly our own. To admire them, was like admiring the beauty of a well-formed woman, one of those Scandinavian women, for example, who have no sex appeal. Besides the weather was unseasonable; we were now in the first week of March and it was the time for blustering south-westerly gales instead of this eternal frost and snow blowing in on an east wind.

Two days ago we got our gales but they were from the east. . . . The fine weather sunset was delusive and with the easterly gale a terrific blizzard blew down on us. I came up to London yesterday evening to find Pall Mall and Trafalgar Square deep in snow which thickened every moment. Gentlemen in the Club decided that the

winter was the longest in living memory, longer even than that of 1894-5, and a new figure, Lord Thaw-Thaw, appeared in the papers to symbolise the public's exasperation with the unfortunate Air Ministry official whose forecast of the thaw had been greeted by a return of the snow.

The following day, that is, to-day March 6th, I had to go to Chester to deliver a lecture, returning on the 7th via Birmingham where I was to open the Birmingham Education Week and to hold a discussion with schoolboys. I ploughed through the snow to the tube station and reached Euston about 1.15 to catch the 1.30 train to Chester. The enquiry office at Euston advised against travelling; conditions, they said, were much worse in the Midlands; a belt of snow stretched from the Wash to the Severn and all travellers to Birmingham were being sent by the G.W.R.

I am old enough to have grown pedantic about engagements—it is a point of honour with me to turn up for a lecture—yet still childish enough to believe in my luck. It is my set belief that when it comes to the point I shall always just not be too late, just get through, just bring it off, just catch the train, where others less lucky fail.

I decided to go, reminding myself of the sanctity of engagements which is, I confess, the way I rationalise to myself my instinctive dislike of being left out of something.

The train was very warm and pretty full which seemed to me to show that things were not as bad as the railway company made out, or at any rate, that a lot of people didn't think they were—odd how on such occasions one suddenly develops a respect for the judgment of other people which, normally, one contemns. The train started blithely off, albeit a little late.

Pretty soon we slowed down and travelled as far as Watford at what, I suppose, was a rate of less than twenty miles an hour; then we accelerated and from Watford to

Bletchley went reasonably fast. By the time we got to Bletchley we were rather more than an hour late. Then the train began to crawl. It was easy for anybody who looked out of the window to see why. The snow, steeply banked on each side of the line, had in places encroached upon it. The lines were not buried in snow—I suppose that men and machines had been at work to clear them—but there was a covering thick enough to delay the trains. Slower and slower we crawled, then stopped, started again, crawled, stopped again and so on a dozen times over. I summoned all my resources of philosophy to deal with the situation. As usual, they were inadequate. I told myself that this thing that was happening to me was due to no fault of my own; that on the contrary I ought to be sustained by the consciousness of doing my duty. The consciousness did not sustain me.

I pointed out to myself that nothing I could do could ameliorate my plight, that I was helpless and should, therefore, relax and resign myself to a situation I could not control. I did not relax. I fumed and fretted in helpless impotence, striving in vain to restrain my anxiety and keep myself from fidgeting. I even entered into conversation with the other occupants of the compartment—there were, I remember, two members of the Inland Revenue staff returning from leave to their lodgings in Llandudno—for me, an unprecedented proceeding. Normally I cower in the corner and glare forbiddingly at the talkers who threaten to disturb my reading. I am, indeed, a strong advocate of non-talking compartments. But not now. I listened eagerly to the woes of the income tax men, sympathised over the rapacity of their landladies, their dislike of the Welsh, their longing to return to London with all its shortages and discomforts. How they hated Llandudno. . . . I drank in this uncharitable chatter as a distraction from the boredom of the journey; and, indeed, it did distract me. But not for long.

The time had long gone by, I thought, when I could

get to Chester in time to deliver my lecture. I cursed myself for a fool; I was both suffering the pains of boring and frustrated hours and missing the lecture and losing the fee which would alone have justified them. And I was helpless—in a trap.

But was I helpless? The train crawled slowly into Blisworth station and drew up at the platform. Why not get out, cross the line and go back to London in the next train? I acted on the impulse and got out. Opposite there was a telegraph office. I wired to the lecture secretary who was to meet me and then put through a call to him. I asked the telephone girl if she knew when there would be a train back to London? She said there had been no "up" trains on the line that day. This alarmed me and I dashed out of the office hoping to get back into my train, only to find it moving out of the station. Visions of hours, perhaps days, snowbound in Blisworth station! Panic! Just then a bell rang in the telegraph office. "I do believe," said the girl, "that that means an 'up' train at last. Yes," she went on, "you are in luck. This is to say it left Nuneaton an hour ago."

Hardly had she finished speaking, when the train actually appeared in the station. I rushed across the bridge and fought my way into it. "Fought" is the word. It was now five o'clock in the afternoon. The train had left Glasgow at eight o'clock the preceding evening; there was no food on the train and the corridors were so packed with people that there was no access to the lavatories, so that people had relieved themselves in the corridors and the compartments. The stench was appalling. I thought of Hitler's torture trains and tried to imagine what these conditions would be like, if one were exposed to them for days and nights on end.

I, mercifully, was not. My luck held and we made good progress to London, stopping however for nearly half an hour just outside Euston station. If I had been in that train for twenty-three hours, this last straw would have unmanned me. We got in at seven.

Company and a Concert

I had a whole evening in front of me, unplanned, unprovided for, a unique and, for me, alarming experience. What should I do with it? I was so demoralised by the experiences of the day, I felt so lonely and low, that the first need was company, the company of known, friendly persons. Who did I know in the neighbourhood of Euston? Why N., of course, and M. It was still snowing as I made my way to Great Ormond Street and knocked at N.'s door. She was in, mercifully, and feeding her baby by the fire before putting it to bed—a warm and comforting spectacle. But there was nothing to drink in the house, so N. took me to the “best pub in London” in Lamb’s Conduit Street, where her husband and a friend were drinking cider. The cider was strong enough to put a kick into my account of my experiences and by the second glass I had them listening, goggle-eyed.

By now I was pretty hungry, so back to Great Ormond Street to M.'s where I found a drink, dinner, musical talk and preparations for going to a concert. M. undertook to drive us there in his car which bumped and slithered over great mounds of frozen snow. The pianist was an old friend whose husband had scaled Official heights, with the consequence that the audience seemed to be composed in almost equal numbers of professional or near-professional musicians and high civil servants. The former all knew one another and chattered gaily as if their main purpose in coming to the concert was to see and to be seen. The high civil servants looked, I thought, a bit out of it and didn't chatter at all. I knew some of both and still in full reaction from the silent wastes of the snowbound train, chattered away with the best of them, enjoying the lights, the greetings and the friendliness.

The concert began with a Handel suite, well and sturdily played. Handel as good as ever—as he always is. What a level the man keeps and what a perpetual injustice one does him, in that one always forgets how

good he is until one hears him again, when one is properly delighted and exalted, makes a vow never to underestimate or to forget him again and promptly proceeds to do so. The next time one hears him the whole process repeats itself—I do a similar injustice, going through a similar sequence of emotions in regard to Haydn and Arnold Bennett. The injustice is, of course, that when you are not actually hearing or reading these men you don't think about them one way or the other, don't speak highly of them when they are mentioned and don't trouble to put yourself in the way of hearing and getting their works.

As the honest, forthright, supremely satisfying music, honestly and forthrightly rendered, alternately soothed and exalted me, I vowed never to "do it" to Handel again. Then came Schubert's Posthumous B Flat Sonata, in my opinion, one of the world's great works. It is a work of wonder and mystery, conveying a sense of the strangeness of existence and of the nearness of unseen things just below the surface. It is very beautiful, albeit too long, and it is touched, especially in the last movement by a "fey" quality, a hint of the light that never was on sea or land. I had first heard the sonata beautifully played by Clifford Curzon; it had been one of the unforgotten musical experiences of my life and I never see or hear Curzon now without thinking of the opening bars of the B Flat. (I told him this once and he was immensely pleased, saying that there was no piece of music with which he would prefer to be associated in a man's mind.) This work, alas! was very far from being the present pianist's "cup of tea." The sturdy, forthright qualities, the hitting the right notes at the right time and hitting them good and true which did well enough for the Handel, wouldn't do here; at least, they weren't enough "to do." There was something "games-mistressey" about this pianist's attitude to the Schubert; just as modern head-mistresses shake a muddy hockey stick at sex in order to give the girls something better to

think about, so she jollied her way through the lovely first movement and thumped and bustled at the mystery and the wonder until they fled dismayed by so much hearty, good feeling. I had the impression that feeling a little uncomfortable herself, she was anxious to get on with it, get through it and get it over. If I may be pardoned for coining the word, she "defeyed" it. By the time she had done with her "Now, girls, bustle up and let's get on with it" attitude, Schubert's Posthumous B Flat sounded very flat indeed.

After the interval in which we all talked nineteen to the dozen there was a fantasy sonata by Michael Tippett. I would not have stayed for this if I had been present under my own auspices, but my hosts knew I had no other engagement and politeness forbade me leaving them, apart from the fact that the pianist was a friend. Besides there was the often-repeated self-admonition, "You know you are unfair to contemporary music, simply because you don't hear it enough to give it and yourself a chance to learn the idiom—so stay and listen." I stayed. I have said all I want to say about contemporary music in another entry and I will not add to it here except to mention that the substitution of Tippett for Britten made, as far as I could tell, no difference whatever.

There followed some undistinguished Ravel and I went home to bed, congratulating myself on having got so well through this uncovenanted evening that had unexpectedly fallen vacant. But to-morrow, when I was to have been in Chester, was vacant too. What was I to do with to-morrow?

March 7th, 1947

CAMPAIGN AGAINST LONELINESS AND BOREDOM.
DRAWBACKS OF THE CAMPAIGN

Campaign against Loneliness and Boredom

I DON'T PROPOSE TO SAY how I answered the question. I propose instead to reflect on the state of mind which prompted it; for this, I suppose, is my distinctive defect—that I am unable to contemplate an unplanned and unfilled tract of time. Why not? Because I shrink from being thrown for long upon my own resources, fearful lest consigned to my own company I should be bored; bored and worse than bored, for, being by myself, I feel tempted, indeed, forced to look within. This experience always alarms me so much that I avert my eyes and look outwards again, as soon as I conveniently can. It is owing to this fear of self acquaintance that I try to make as many and as varied occasions for looking outwards as I can, filling my days for weeks ahead with engagements to occupy, duties to claim and people to divert me. None of this, I should explain, applies to the morning which I can spend by myself in reading and writing happily enough; in fact, I demand the mornings to myself and if I cannot get them, feel irritable and frustrated and count the day wasted. It is after lunch or, rather, after the past-luncheon nap that the need for diversion begins to be felt and when the evening comes, especially if it is dark, the need to be in the company of my kind becomes importunate. Without people about me I am not only bored but frightened and so I plan my evenings weeks ahead and go in terror of being let down and left alone. Thus, my life is a planned campaign against boredom and loneliness. On the whole the campaign succeeds well enough. I live a varied life and a more versatile one than most of my kind, playing games

and doing country things as well as reading and writing books and living the life of a London intellectual. The fact that this variety and versatility which I am accustomed to claim as virtues are at bottom only bastions in the system of defences I have erected against loneliness and boredom, does not detract from their success in the eyes of the world or, indeed, diminish the very real fun which I have had from them.

The secret springs of our actions are rarely, so the psycho-analysts tell us, creditable, and I don't see why I should be under any obligation to pretend that mine are better than anyone else's or better than they are by claiming that it was originally for their own sweet sakes that I read books, wrote books, studied philosophy, tutored classes, walked in and through most of the counties of England, made love, sought to attract friends, rode horses, played tennis, played cricket, learnt to garden, swam, played hockey, spoke in public, sat on committees, worked for causes, bought a farm. . . . Besides, I have been taught and in my turn have taught others that our actions are not wholly contained in or derivable from their origins and that it is by their fruits as well as by their roots that our lives must be judged. Thus I may have often embarked on activities in order to escape from loneliness and myself and continued them for their own sakes.

Drawbacks of the Campaign

On the whole, I repeat, these varied fortifications that I have erected against self-knowledge have been reasonably successful, at any rate up to the present. But, as I have grown older, a number of cracks have revealed themselves in the structure of my defences; in particular, five. First, the campaign for the avoidance of self knowledge involves a continual turning to and taking up of new things. Now the continual turning to and taking up of new things demands a considerable expenditure of energy, since in order to get much fun out

of them one has to be able to do them to some purpose. Take tennis; unless one plays it reasonably well, tennis is a bore; moreover, one finds difficulty in getting anybody to play with one. Or riding; unless one is relatively at home on a horse, the thing becomes an ordeal and one's person a laughing stock. Again, if one perseveres with any activity or pursuit to its natural and appointed end, one runs the risk of being bored; if one drains the cup to the dregs, disillusioned. Hence, one must be continually on one's guard against having too much of a good thing and the best safeguard that I know is to be ready to stop anything and everything, while one still wants to go on with it. Now, this willingness to stop requires an act of energetic determination, because it means saying "No" to those parts of oneself that still want to go on. On the whole, I usually want to stop. I have spent my life wanting things to be over and myself to be away from them before other people do. For me, all the concerts and plays are too long; for me, all commemorations, convocations, receptions, parties, committees, become tedious before they are finished. I always want to finish my visit before my hosts have done with me and my guests to go before they show any tendency to go themselves. I have always wanted to be done with love making before the other party had had enough of it—or nearly always. Sometimes, however, I do want to go on; on these occasions I try on principle to make myself stop before I want to. The principle is rendered easier of observance, if you have so contrived it that you are claimed elsewhere; hence, the importance of a planned and packed life. For always on the programme of such a life another item lies in wait to invite or demand one's presence; in other words, there is always something to "go on" to, something which forces one to terminate one's present activity. Now, to tear oneself away while one is still deriving enjoyment or feeling interest, requires a certain energy of determination—one has to take the situation by the throat as it were—

and on occasion involves pain. As one grows older the energy grows less, and the constant obligation to ring the changes upon a large and varied number of engagements, avocations and pleasures is felt as a burden.

Secondly, I no longer enjoy things as much as I did and especially do I not enjoy physical things as I did. For example, my age and weight have transformed the ascent of mountains into a weariness bordering upon pain; one tires at tennis, plays it less well and cannot play it for so long. This applies also, though in less degree to some of the things of the mind. Inevitably, as one gets older one's interests contract; other people seem sillier and their conversation more boring; one is increasingly incapable of reading a new book. Here, then, is a vicious circle or—a more exact simile—an accelerated revolution of Ixion's wheel, since an ever more crowded round of pleasures and diversions is needed to make up for the fact that their power to please and to divert is less. Faster and faster grows the pace; harder and harder to satisfy, the need for distraction, until presently one wishes to God that one could bear to sit still and listen and be at peace.

Thirdly, the system is hard on other people and, if pursued long enough, arouses their dislike. An only child whose holidays were often passed in hotels, I suffered terribly from loneliness. I used to spend wistful days looking for other children to play with. My memories of holidays are shot through with the vision of groups of other children, friendly, happy children all of whom knew one another but whom, alas, I did not know and who did not know me. Nor did they want to; hopeful, yet timid, I would approach, longing to be included in the favoured group, only to be rebuffed. This made me humble but it did not make me happy. It is also, I imagine, the source of my life-long dislike of hotels and has led to the formation of that rule of life—I recorded in an earlier entry the disastrous results of breaking it—never to stay in a hotel alone.

I have never wholly forgotten those early experiences. Sometimes consciously, always instinctively, I have ever since been looking out for people to play with, storing them up and winding them round myself in layers of double and triple fold, so that if the first fold were to give way, if, in other words, somebody were to let me down, there would always be a second string to fall back on. I have found it easy to attract people (of a sort) and in adult life have never lacked for companions. But after a time people have come to see that I was misusing them by treating them not as ends but as means to my ends, means, that is to say, to ensure that I should never be left with nobody to play with and, as the years have passed, though I have grown more skilful in disguising this instrumentalist attitude to other people, every now and then the truth manages to pop out. It is all too obvious that I have summoned somebody merely in order to help me to get through a solitary evening; what is worse it has sometimes been only too obvious that I have despatched them because somebody or something more attractive has turned up. Or, I have brought them to me at great inconvenience to themselves, treating their time and convenience as things of no account and then have been unable to conceal my boredom in their company. Yes, that is the trouble—it is, in fact, the fourth loophole in my system of fortifications—as I have grown older, I have grown more easily bored.

The old need to attract people, to utilise them as padding against loneliness and self-knowledge still persists, persists partly as a need, partly as a habit of such long-standing that I cannot break myself of it, and when, in pursuit of the habit, I have called and they have come, all too often I have not known what to do with them and have wished them well and quickly away. Thus, my life is spent in a perpetual alternation between two rhythms, the rhythm of attracting people for fear I may be lonely, and the rhythm of trying to get rid of them because I know that I am bored.

This, of course, is apt to be disconcerting for the people and presently, as I have said, they find out what I am after and give me up as a bad job. Moreover, since only second-rate people will put up with the treatment for any length of time, I tend to be surrounded with my inferiors.

A further objection lies on the score of morality. When I was young and amoral, I did not mind how unscrupulously I misused people for my ends, provided that I had them to misuse. As I have grown older, I have become entangled in the moralities and developed a conscience. I have seen the wickedness of my ways and tried to reform. I have tried—I really have—never to summon people merely to keep the wolves of loneliness and self-knowledge from the door and when, having summoned them, I have wanted to be quit of them, I have made greater and, I hope, more successful efforts to disguise the fact. For mercifully one can use words to disguise one's feelings; one can even control the movements of one's body, feigning the sound of one's voice and restraining the movements of one's face; one can keep one's seat from fidgeting in its chair, one's mouth from yawning, one's feet from tapping, one's eyes from looking at one's watch. Indeed, one can control all the aversions and indifferences of the body except one, which is why the boredom of the lover is the hardest of all to disguise. The fact that I grow bored with people, yet am constrained by reason of increasing virtue to make keener efforts to disguise the fact, puts an increasing strain upon the system. And there is a fifth drawback, a drawback which, being in the very nature of things, would, had I been wise, have sufficed to damn the system from the first. It is the drawback of time. Time flows staunchlessly on; however extensive the ramparts you build to keep out the flood, sooner or late they come, like the Maginot Line, to an end. But time is endless. Moreover, the ramparts are never quite watertight; they leak and time comes seeping through, which, being translated, means

that however carefully you have padded your life with engagements and diversions, your arrangements are always apt to break down. The woman you were going to dine with is ill or, even worse, you are ill yourself; the weather puts the game of tennis out of court—snow, by the way, as I have said in another entry, puts everything out of court; the girl decides not to come; the date is postponed; you get your dates wrong and turn up to-day for to-morrow's appointment; or you get the time wrong and you turn up at seven for the theatre which begins at eight; or, as happened yesterday, you find that you cannot give your lecture and return to London with an empty evening on your hands to be followed by an unfilled day.

And, though you may fill your life for weeks ahead, there are always weeks beyond, vast immensities of time, stretching to the grave and clamouring to be filled before your demands are at last stilled and you can be at rest. And you know that with every passing year, as you grow older and more crotchety and unattractive, as your energy fails and you play fewer games and go shorter walks, or your body breaks up and you are more liable to upset your programme through illness, as people bore you more and more and there is less and less in you to interest them—you know in your heart that the system will work with ever greater strains and stresses, so that your predicament resembles that of the juggler who with failing arms is obliged to keep ever the same number of balls spinning in the air. All of which, as I said above, convicts the system of being fundamentally unsound in its whole conception. Looking back now, I can see that to try to get through your life by the aid of a series of distractions and engagements is like trying to keep a light at night by striking a series of matches. The right method, of course, is to achieve a sufficient serenity of spirit to preclude the need for planned distractions and to render one immune from the effects of a break-down of plans. In other words, one should become self-sufficient, or at

least be able to bear the thought and the company of oneself. No doubt. Others have said the same—in fact, many others. But how? Alas! they have not told us.

April 1st, 1947

PARIS: THE FIRST TIME SINCE THE WAR

TO PARIS WITH MISGIVING. I had been often enough before the war, had even, incited by the alleged example of A. E. Housman, flown to Paris in the morning, had lunch and returned the same afternoon. But I had not been since 1939. I had never known many people in Paris and I had lost contact with most of those that I had known. Only one family, that of my old friend, R. S., journalist, writer and expert radio commentator, was to my knowledge still extant. I had largely forgotten the use of those fluent but inaccurate and woefully mispronounced sounds that I had been wont to inflict upon my friends under the pretence of talking French. Above all I knew that life in Paris was different, that prices were high, food scarce, good wine hard to come by, the black market ubiquitous and the Parisians dulled and hardened by the prolonged duration of their hardships.

Things were worse than I had thought, so much worse that, had I known how bad they were, I should not have gone. There was no butter, no milk and no sugar. There was no coffee but a coffee substitute whose taste was so horrible that it was only the merciful accident of my having brought a flask of rum with which I was able to lace it, that enabled me to drink it all. The hotel, at which I stayed for four nights—I had been going there ever since I could remember; the family were old friends and, though modest, the hotel had always given me a comfortable bed with delicious coffee and a roll for my breakfast. The bedroom looked out on a little courtyard with a fig tree and here after breakfast I had been wont to sit reading and writing till twelve o'clock when it was time to go out for a drink and lunch. I do not know where

I have written more happily and readily than sitting in a faded plush armchair in that stuffy little mid-nineteenth-century hotel bedroom, with its hideous wallpaper, heavy plush curtains and gurgling pipes—this little hotel, I say, had been sadly brought down. There was no hot water in the taps—there was no fuel, they said, with which to heat it—and no polish to clean one's shoes. They were apologetic, charmingly, as only the French can be, but—there it was. I went out to the Deux Magots, sat down and asked for an aperitif, Mandarin I had been used to have or Pernod. There was neither. What then? "a Pineau," suggested the waiter. I had one. It tasted of aniseed and turpentine; it was horrible. I complained to the waiter. He shrugged his shoulders and suggested that I had a Vermouth; it was almost tasteless. The only tolerable aperitif I drank all the time I was in Paris was in the company of English people who had their own supplies of Vermouth and gin from England. It is one of the paradoxes of our time that every country exports its best abroad, keeping only the scourgings of the bucket for its own citizens.

I dined at a small hotel in the Rue Mazarin. The food was meagre—no meat, but a mess of kidneys; the wine poor; price for food and wine about fifteen shillings. Before I left England, everybody told me that I could change pounds at a rate of exchange considerably in excess of the official rate of 480 francs to the pound. "Where?" I asked. "Oh, anybody will do it for you, waiters, hotel porters, people in shops."

I tried it on the waiter. No success. During the ensuing days I tried my pounds on a number of people. Still no success. Finally I changed them at the official rate. People telling tall stories as usual? No doubt. But our currency, I was told, had depreciated as the result of the coal crisis.

April 3rd, 1947

PARIS: DISPRAISE AND PRAISE OF THE FRENCH

VENTURED ON A LUNCH at a swell black market restaurant, beginning with snails. Good; but not so good as I had been led to expect, though the wine, a Chateau Neuf, was lovely. Cost at the official rate of exchange about £2. The waiter essayed a piece of sharp practice. All commodities in France including meals were subject to a ten per cent. cut as the result of Monsieur Blum's hitherto successful attempt to lower the cost of living. At the bottom of the bill, which was 1,000 francs, there was written "*Baisse* 10 per cent.—100 francs," but the words were written, as indeed was the whole bill, so illegibly that there was nothing to prevent the waiter from trading on my supposed ignorance of the situation by *adding* instead of *subtracting* the 100 francs and presenting a bill for 1,100 francs. When I protested he excused himself and took off the 200 francs. The incident set me thinking. The French have always been near and grasping about money. Always one has had the impression that they would "do" you, if they could; but now their rapacity was overwhelming and ubiquitous. Every Frenchman, as it seemed to me, was trying to make illegitimate profit out of every other Frenchman and all of them out of the foreigner.

Paris had become a hard city; it was also an irritable city. As a people the French have always been impatient with foreigners. The difficulty of pronouncing the French language properly is for the foreigner almost intolerable, but the French have little patience with his efforts. Almost, it would seem, they resent them; they are not amused by one's mispronunciations; they are bored with them. Nor have they ever tempered the winds of their swift speech to the slow understanding of the foreigner; they speak and insist on speaking to him just as fast as they speak among themselves.

How gloomily they frown as they ostentatiously seek to understand; how restlessly they fidget as one stumbles to the end of one's halting sentences. All this is understandable enough. The French are so much quicker than anybody else that it is only natural that they should be impatient. Nine times out of ten they know what is coming long before it comes. Why, then, wait for it? And as for the sense—well really, it is very rarely that one can have much to communicate that will interests *them*; not, at any rate, in the world or ideas. How can I have anything to say on philosophy, or science, or politics, or literature, or history, that could possibly intrigue a Frenchman? He knows it all already, in so far as it is worth knowing, while as for the language of criticism and appreciation, and the record of the soul's exploration among the masterpieces of art, how much richer and subtler are his reactions than one's own; why, then, *should* he trouble to listen? I am putting all this as if the French were intellectually conceited prigs. Well, why not? They *are* intellectually superior and why should they pretend not to know it? I know pretty much how they feel about us, when I have contact with Americans, and I sympathise. Intercourse with children bores and fatigues persons of comparatively adult mind. . . .

But the point I am trying to make is that all this, to me, very justifiable French impatience and irritation felt by the adult with the comparatively adolescent was intensified to a point at which it was no longer justified. How the citizens of Paris jostled one in the streets, elbowed one on the platforms of the buses, pushed past one in the *cafés*; how they scowled at one because one spoke slowly; how they turned their impatient backs and shrugged their contemptuous shoulders, as they abandoned even before they had begun, the effort to understand.

And here, I think, one comes in sight of the worst of the many bad things that have happened in France. The misfortunes have been so many, the hardships and the

shortages have persisted for so long that some spring seems to have been broken in the spirit. All the fizz and sparkle had gone out of the French and they had grown resigned. Now, for us to be resigned is all very well; "enduring it," "taking it," "seeing it through," "keeping a stiff upper lip" and so on is our *forte*; that is the way we are made. But with the French it is not so; resignation in them is unnatural. They ought to be turning the earth upside down with the vociferous intensity of their protest; demanding that miracles should be performed to put things right overnight and very nearly performing them. And because it is unnatural, the strain shows itself in the unpleasing traits that I have mentioned, the rapacity, the almost pathological impatience and irritability.

So much having been said in its dispraise, Paris, I felt, was still for me, the centre of the world, the fountain head of our civilisation, and the French still the heads and leaders of our species.

By this I mean, that they are the furthest removed from the bestial. This remoteness from the bestial expresses itself more particularly in two things, both of which seemed to me to be unimpaired. First, there was the physical beauty of Paris still, for me, the loveliest city I have seen, the city in which nature has been most happily used to serve the purposes of man. When I gazed once again up the vista from the quadrangle of the Louvre through the Tuileries Gardens along the Champs Élysées to the Arc de Triomphe—there were no fountains, but the trees were just coming out and there were flowers in the beds—my heart gave a little jump of pleasure; another, when I looked up the river to the *Cité* from the new Pont Carroussel; another, at the view of St. Germain des Près from the Deux Magots. How lovely this city is and how varied in its loveliness. Now, except for a few statues which the Germans have taken away this loveliness is not impaired.

Secondly, there is the intellectual life. This appeared

to be as vigorous as ever; perhaps more vigorous. Certainly I had never seen so many young men walking about with paintings under their arms, while the little book and picture shops in the streets on the left bank seemed to be more numerous than before the war. At one of the *cafés*, the *Flores*, I think, a group of young men were sitting in attitudes of unconcealed admiration, grouped round a central figure—Jean-Paul Sartre, somebody told me in a reverend voice. Picasso, I was informed, was on view in another *café*. At the tables, men were sitting talking nineteen to the dozen about politics and philosophy. Here, at last, was a world in which to be an intellectual was *not* a badge of shame, in which that word of biting derogation “Brainy” was unknown, in which ideas counted and minds played freely.

April 4th, 1947

PARIS: EVENING PROBLEM IN PARIS

MORE ABSORBING TO THE French even than art and philosophy were politics. They were discussed vividly and interminably. I dined last night with the Ss., old friends of many years standing, and lunched to-day with the Ds., whom I had also known before the war. At both meals the young were present at Ss., two daughters, aged about twenty and a son of twenty-three; at Ds., a son and daughter in the late teens. At both meals politics were the main subject of conversation. De Gaulle was due to make one of his speeches at the week-end and round this event the political talk turned.

The differences of view were significant. Both the Ss. and the Ds. were warm supporters of the General; he would, they thought, bring stability and security to France and a surcease from the shortages and discomforts due to the idleness and rapacity of the working class. At S.'s all three children were Communists and spoke of the coming "show down." At D.'s the son denounced politics of all kinds and party politics in particular—De Gaulle, he maintained, was no better than the rest. For his part, he would have none of politics, thought them the curse of France and would emigrate if he got the chance. Meanwhile he would scrounge and malingering, do the best for himself that he could and let the State go hang—a common attitude this, I was told, although not always so frankly expressed.

This evening I was faced with a problem that presented itself with a familiarity dating from the remote past, the problem of what to do in Paris in the evening. A Paris day has always filled itself for me easily and pleasantly. In the morning I work and, as I have explained, I have nowhere written so happily as in the bedroom of my Paris hotel, looking out on the little courtyard with its fig

tree. This goes on until twelve o'clock when I walk out to meet friends for a drink before lunch. The lunch is, or rather was, long and elaborate, exquisitely agreeable but disabling, so much so that after a brief visit to the Louvre or some current exhibition of pictures, I have felt constrained to return to the hotel about four to go to sleep. How one sleeps in Paris! Some cities are good for working, some for sleeping and some for love-making; Paris is the best I know for all three.

At six out again, another drink, dinner—and then what? For with the coming of nightfall, the carefree mood of the morning has vanished. Paris now takes on for me a slightly sinister air and it is necessary, one feels, to watch one's step if one is to escape disaster. Some step, however, must be taken or one will be bored or lonely; the question is what? It is now that the problem of the evening assails me. My English friends speak of wonderful evenings in Paris. They go to the Folies Bergères or the Bal Tabarin and dance. But I am too old for that. Besides I hate sitting at little tables, drinking bad and enormously expensive champagne, a prey to every shark who wants to make money out of me, wondering what on earth to say to partners, acquaintances or friends, tired to death and bored to tears. Others go to a "spicy" show at the Red Tower or Black Cat or something of the kind in Montmartre. But I am too *blasé* to be excited by the observation of what is not after all so very obscene. I like my pornography to be combined with wit and these places are rarely witty. Besides, I am not sexually starved, nor am I a business man having a spree away from the wife.

Others again, and these are most of my friends who have reached a certain age, patronise the theatre proper. They go to the *Comédie Française*, or to the Opera to see Racine or Corneille or Molière. I, too, used once to go to the serious French theatre, until I permitted myself to realise that I understood very little of what I heard. I have no aptitude for languages and am no

better at understanding than at talking French. Yet I have been trying to understand and to talk it all my adult life so that, reflecting upon the exiguous percentage of words spoken on the stage that I have really understood, I could not help asking myself whether the French of my friends, admittedly superior, was so very much superior as their behaviour, indicative of complete comprehension and extreme pleasure, suggested. To hear them talk, you would suppose that to have listened in the past to Bernhardt or Coquelin, or to Guitry and Yvonne Printemps in the present were among the really outstanding experiences of their lives, whereas I, after maintaining for half an hour the unequal struggle to understand, have had to choose between retiring humiliated and defeated, or staying to be tired and bored.

I suppose that at the theatre one normally hears only a small part of any particular word, the rest of the word being supplied by associative habit. I suppose, too, that nobody hears more than a small percentage of the total number of words uttered, the rest being again supplied by habit. The small percentage of partly heard words serves as a cue upon which the activity of the interpretative imagination gets to work.

Now, the difficulty of listening to a play in a foreign language arises from the fact that one needs to hear far more of the cue word in order that one may recognise it for what it is; in fact, one usually needs to hear the whole word. Also, since the imagination is not easily set going by the unfamiliar sounds, one has to hear a much greater proportion of the words. As I have grown older, I have grown slightly deaf and hear an even smaller part of the spoken word; don't, in fact, hear enough of it to enable it to perform its function as a "cue." Abroad, it is only if I sit in the front row of the stalls, that I can hear enough to make sense of the play at all. This explains, to my own satisfaction at least, why I don't go to the serious French theatre.

What else is there for the evening? The films? But what a waste of time and what a waste of Paris. One can see as good films in London; in fact, since we only get the cream of the French films, one can see better French films.

To spend the evening dining with friends? But (i) I don't know enough friends to go round; (ii) if they are English, I get bored with a whole evening spent in their company; (iii) if they are French, I presently tire of trying to talk and understand, while after a drink or two my French becomes so wildly and imaginatively inventive that I have known even the politest hosts gape in horrified astonishment at the outrages that I practise upon their language.

What, then, remains? Well, there is the Grand Guignol! I have a taste for horrors, my only complaint being that they are hardly ever horrible enough, and these short horror plays are apt to be so full of crude, violent action that even my imperfect knowledge of the language is sufficient to enable me to understand what is going on. When, for example, an erring wife is walled up by her husband in a block of marble which is subsequently hewn into a statue of the corpse by her sculptor lover, even I can understand, while the language of torture is, after all, common to all mankind. . . . The occasional farces with their slapstick and knockabout are almost equally intelligible. Hence, in the past, almost every Paris trip has included for me a visit to the Rue Chaptal. I have also gone pretty frequently to the Circus where nobody talks except the clowns and the ring-master, and one can enjoy the acrobats and the horses. In fact, the circus would do very well as a means of getting through the evening if it were not for the performing animals, the dogs and the bears and the lions, which I find boring and painful. It does not interest me to see dogs standing on their hind legs or lions mauling the tamer's head and hands, and nothing will alter my conviction that force or constraint of some kind must be employed to make

animals perform actions which are so contrary to their natures. Why indeed, should we suppose that they are not employed? We know enough about the practices of the fur and feather trades, about the methods of sealers and whalers and beaver trappers, to know that there is no beastliness from which men will shrink—from tearing unborn seals from the wombs of their mothers to leaving silver foxes to languish in steel traps for weeks before meeting their death by starvation—when it comes to the question of filling their pockets by feeding the vanity of allegedly compassionate women. . . . But it is the imbecility of the ritual that the wretched animals are, at the expense of so much suffering and constraint, made to go through, that arouses my chief resentment. Why, I wonder, should men behave like beasts in order that they may cause beasts to behave like imbeciles? . . .

Apart from the animals I like the circus very well, but it is like the Grand Guignol in this—one cannot, it is obvious, visit it more than once.

And so, as I said at the beginning, the evening in Paris is for me something of a problem.

What, I wonder, do others of my kind and country do? I have never had a fully satisfactory answer to this question. I conclude that I enjoy myself as much as anybody else when I go to Paris up to and including dinner time, and that thereafter others possess a secret that escapes me.

April 20th, 1947

TWO DAYS IN GALLOWAY: MY HOST. OUT-OF-DOOR LUNCHEES.
THE SANDWICH. BOOTS AND SHOES. MISERY OF HAIL.
GLORY OF DRINK, THE EMPEROR AND THE D MINOR
CONCERTO

E. M. FORSTER ONCE ASKED the question, which, if any, are the supremely happy days in literature, days whose brightness is without fleck or flaw, and gave as his first choice the day in *War and Peace* when Nicholas Rostov and Natacha go hunting with the little Uncle. It is a good answer and, for my part, I do not think that I should wish to give a different one. But this was a day of almost unmixed physical endeavour and its delights those which arise from the exercise of the body. It may be for this reason that, when I set myself to think of the days in my own life which would qualify for the appellation of "happiest," it is almost always of days given over to physical things, to horse-riding, or playing tennis, or going on foot alone through the English countryside, of days, above all, spent among mountains that I think. (And yet, now that I am old, fat, and feeble, it would be wrong to describe these days, in so far as they now occur, as happy; they are too mixed with pain, the pain of fatigue, the pains of fear and giddiness, fear of turning an ankle, giddiness on heights, the pain of regret—why can't I run down the hillsides as I once used to do? Why, I scold, haven't I kept my body fit, self-indulgent beast that I am? No, these days are not happy—not now; significant is the word for them, by which I mean that on these days there is an edge to life, common things seem unfamiliar, seem, too, immensely more important than on ordinary days; I mean also that because of the edge that life takes, and of the strangeness that lies upon common things, the days stand out in one's memory.)

One such day occurred yesterday in Galloway.

I had wanted to visit Galloway ever since I looked out upon its hills twenty years ago from the windows of the train that runs along the old Midland line from London to Glasgow, the Thames-Clyde express it used to be called. It started from St. Pancras and, although it took an hour or two longer than the direct route from Euston, I can remember deliberately choosing it in those far-off leisured days, because I wanted to see new country from its windows. Besides, one gets so tired of Bletchley and Stafford and Crewe and Warrington and the rest of them. Also, nobody I had ever known had been to Galloway. Also, John Buchan's *Memory Hold the Door* had intrigued me with its fascinating account of the district—fascinating because written by one who was fascinated. Parenthetically, what a lovely book! What a lot he knew about and how much he cared for wild places! Pity he was such a snob!

I had made my speeches in Edinburgh and Glasgow, won free from the eminent persons who had smothered me with hospitality, assailing me at the points where my defences are weakest with rich food and drink—there was one tremendous dinner in the New Club at Glasgow—and making me even softer and fatter and flabbier than usual, making me, in fact, very much as they were themselves.

The train crawled along the coast of Ayrshire to Girvan, where I was met by my Galloway host. It was a fine day with clouds sailing high before a northerly wind; a day when, it was obvious, the views would be wide and far. We drove to the top of the Nick of the Balloch, lunched beside the car and walked out on to Polmaddie Hill to the west. The views were tremendous, to the southwest the Isle of Man, to the south the hills of the Lake District, inducing in me a sudden twinge of nostalgia, to the north, Ailsa Craig and the mountains of Arran with a hint of more distant peaks beyond, and to the east the hills of Galloway with Merrick, the highest, prominent in the foreground. And nowhere in all that view

was there a sign of human habitation. That, for me, was the great thing—the fact that there was nobody at all about, no tourists, no motorists, not even, so far as I could see, any residents. Nor, indeed, are there. Newton Stewart, the largest town in the district, is about the size of Midhurst; Wigtown, where my host lived, is a large village. On reflection, I must withdraw my too optimistic assertion about the absence of tourists. On our subsequent way to Wigtown we drove up Glen Trool, the local beauty spot where on a hill above the Loch is a stone commemorating Robert Bruce's first victory over the English. Glen Trool is, indeed, very lovely though the Forestry Commission have done their usual best to diminish its loveliness, by blanketing the bare lines of the hills that run down to the Loch with their familiar lines of regimented conifers; but there are still plenty of hard woods in the Glen, particularly oaks, ashes and beech, and, as these were still in different stages of coming out, with the leaves of each tree a different tint of green, as the blue-bells and primroses were still growing in their shade, the Glen was in that first phase of springtime loveliness that makes you catch your breath and think of fairies. But, infesting the Loch, alas, were three cars, whose owners, overcoated and bespectacled, were sitting wrapped in their rugs, shivering under the lees of their cars, "enjoying" their "picnic teas," a lamentable spectacle in such a place.

My Host

A word now about my host, one of the most remarkable men I have met in years. I had first seen him *compèring* a show in London, a task which he performed with such verve and style that I could not forbear writing to him to tell him how good an old hand like myself had thought him. A correspondence sprang up; he lived, it appeared, in Galloway and was a confirmed bird-watcher. Presently he sent me a brace of widgeon that he had shot, and when I wrote to him of my old-time desire to see Galloway, it

was as natural, perhaps, for him to ask me to stay with him as it was agreeable for me to consent. A large, bearded man with a great bland voice, he had lived a varied life. He had been a civil and constructional engineer and a fruit-grower. He had driven motor cars in races and played the French horn; he had *not* been a *croupier* in Monte Carlo but, as a student in Bonn during the inflation, he had kept his own private quartet. On his moderate allowance he had been able to sleep, feed and house the four men who played for him on demand. What, I asked, did they play? "Why, Mozart, of course," he said, looking at me in surprise. He had been a lieutenant in the Navy, and a captain in the International Force that supervised and controlled the Saar Plebiscite. He had fought in the International Brigade in the Spanish Civil War. Incidentally, he was a keen Socialist and had been a member of the Communist Party. He had farmed in Canada and shot big game in South Africa. No doubt there are other contradictions in his career which I now forget. The subject on which I soon discovered him to be an expert was natural life in all its forms. He recognised odd flowers, named mosses, hurried to identify insignificant looking moths, discoursed on the habits and haunts of the peregrines and described the long vigils spent in watching pintails on the marshes by moonlight. As I watched him call a cuckooing cuckoo to him by so exactly imitating its note that the bird was deceived into supposing an intruder on its territory, I told myself with delight that here was a wholly idiosyncratic, fully developed, complete individual, one of the rapidly diminishing band of English or, as he would insist, Scottish eccentrics, a species rapidly being ironed into uniformity by the dead-levelling tendencies of our time.

My host had a number of jobs to tinker with, I, my writing, and it was not until eleven next day that we set off in his antiquated Rolls, 1924 model, for the hills. Curley Wee, standing over Loch Dee, 2,212 feet high, was

our objective. (I had already heard of it as being not too dull to climb—most of the Galloway hills are very large, long grass mounds—and us affording as good an all-round view as any height in the district.)

We drove through Newton Stewart, turned north-east and so along a winding road past the Cairnsmore of Fleet, a massive grass hump with a top three miles long, to Clatteringshaws Loch, an artificial lake, the product of a dam, visible expression of the first hydro-electric power scheme in Scotland, looking with its regular proportions, long concrete lines and barbed wire fencing, horribly out of place. These things always do. Hitherto, the works of man have fitted into a receptive nature; it is only in the twentieth century that they have imposed themselves upon a nature that seems to protest. The most disagreeable feature of these artificial reservoirs is their shores. When the water falls—and on this occasion it had fallen very low, this being the twentieth day of a drought—there are exposed not the surroundings of the natural lake with their characteristic under-water vegetation, but a rim of dirty, brown mud.

Past this artificial lake we drove with averted eyes and came at last to the farm of Craigencallie. It lies at the head of a valley at the end of the road and is, I imagine, one of the most remote farms in the country, being, I should guess, about twenty miles from New Galloway where are the nearest shops and four or five from the nearest habitation. It was nearly one o'clock, but getting out of the car, stupid, low, and chilled, feeling as one always does after a long car drive, all liver and no legs, I pleaded to be allowed to climb a little before we lunched. We climbed, I suppose, some 700 to 800 feet and sat down to our lunch.

Out-of-Door Lunches. The Sandwich

Insufficient attention has, in my opinion, been given to the subject of out-of-door lunches. "You will take some sandwiches," says the housewife or hotel keeper or

lodging housekeeper or the farmer's wife, saying it brightly as one conferring a benediction, knowing, however, in her black heart that the sandwich is the easiest and quickest way of fobbing off her victim with—nothing at all.

If I had my way, I would make the provision of the sandwich a punishable offence. Even at its best its *two* bread walls entail a wholly disproportionate relation of bread to what lies between. If a proper relation of bread to "middle" is to be maintained, the sandwich should, I suggest, dispense with one of its walls.

These remarks apply, of course, only to the properly-filled sandwich. Even before the war this was a rarity. Tearing off one of the walls one would find a thin shaving of ham fat or a gobbet of uncatable gristle, which the saving concealment of the walls had enabled the wickedness of the sandwich preparer to impose upon the innocence of the sandwich eater. Or the sandwiches would contain egg. Eggs, like bread, are the background rather than the foreground of food; they require, then, to be eaten with something whose taste is sharp and positive, with ham, for example, with a sardine or an onion. To put eggs in a sandwich is to pile a Pelion of insipidity upon an Ossa of tastelessness, apart altogether from the horrible appearance and loathsome yellow oozing of this misbegotten comestible. The egg, if taken at all, should be hard boiled in shell, or packed cold in the form of an omelette garnished with sharp tasting herbs or cheese. But all these strictures belong to the pre-war sandwich. Starting from these low beginnings, a sandwich could not, one might well have thought, decline further. The war has shown such a supposition, had it been entertained, to be fallacious. For with the war the sandwich nose-dived from its antecedent low level to plumb unheard-of depths of squalor. The antecedent low state of the sandwich I attribute to three characteristics of the British hotel, boarding or lodging-housekeeper, farmer's wife or wife *tout court*, (a) her laziness; she did not

want to go to the trouble of cooking anything; (*b*) her meanness; she did not want to give the walker his money's worth and behind the convenient wall of the sandwich she was enabled to conceal her economies at his expense; (*c*) her gentility; she did not want to soil the fingers of refinement by handling slabs of meat. Bread is nice; meat is not. Indeed, meat is rather savage. Safely encased between bread walls its contaminating contact can be very largely avoided.

To these considerations the war added a new one; real shortage of food. As a result, the pretence of beef or ham was given up and a faint smear of tasteless fish or meat paste was now thought to be sufficient. I have eaten sandwiches prepared by Lakeland farmers' wives, not in other connections noticeably bad food-providers, from which even the smear had disappeared. They contained nothing but a little "marge." . . . For these and other reasons, I eschew the sandwich where possible. My host held similar views, with the result that on this day we lunched on a duck egg each, some slices of a "meat loaf," a sort of *pâté* made of liver, ham, herbs and garlic, highly seasoned and strongly flavoured, bestowed upon me by my London housekeeper, some slices of ham and tongue, a large parkin cake made with gingerbread and treacle, washed down by two bottles each of beer. Not a great lunch in itself, but on the other hand pretty good for the post-war era. Galloway, it will be inferred, is a land which, comparatively speaking, flows with milk and honey.

After lunch we climbed to the top of a shoulder, some 1,600 feet above sea-level, and surveyed our mountain. We had, as it turned out, made a bad choice of route for we were separated from Curley Wee by what seemed to be two considerable drops of several hundred feet—there subsequently proved to be three of them. Nothing is more disheartening when you are walking in the hills than to lose height on the way to your objective. Down perforce you must go knowing that each step will

subsequently have to be made good before the real ascent can begin and your heart—at least my heart—goes down too.

The going was rough; much of the time we were half-knee deep in heather and under the heather the ground was studded with concealed stones and rocks. This is one of the most exhausting kinds of walking I know, combining as it does three different ardours, the ardour of lifting your feet to an inordinate height to get them out of the heather, the ardour of thrusting them down again through the resistance of a foot or so of heather, and the ardour of placing them upon, scraping about on the surface of and, all too often, slipping off, concealed stones.

Boots and Shoes

To make matters worse, I was wearing a pair of new boots. Foolish, rash, at best hazardous? No doubt, but I had had no alternative. I had sent my old cracked and leaky boots for the repairs they so badly needed to the provincial firm from which I had originally bought them. The day before I came away they had been returned to me as irreparable, together with a message that, if a new pair of the same calibre were required, these could be sent direct to the address in Scotland from which I was to walk. I had no alternative but to welcome the offer and the new boots were waiting for me when I arrived at Wigtown. They seemed, I thought, suspiciously easy and comfortable at their first putting on. I had not been walking for an hour before my suspicions were confirmed. They were a shade too large. Not only do over-capacious boots gall the feet which tend to rattle about inside their roomy encasements; they militate against sure-footedness. The well-fitting boot should be an extension of the foot. When the foot is in imperfect control of its encasement, it plants itself insecurely upon the ground's uneven surface, with the result that all too often it slips as it is put down and there is a serious risk of ankle-turning.

All this is very tiring and I congratulated myself upon my foresight in bringing a pair of strong shoes in my rucksack, in case the boots should prove intolerable. After about a couple of hours I put the shoes on, but, strong and well-fitting as they were, they were nailless. I need not here dilate upon the folly of wearing nailless shoes upon mountains. At every step you take in your ascent of a steep, green slope you slip back a couple of inches, particularly if, as on this occasion, the grass is slippery owing to weeks of drought, while on rocks or scree you are pretty helpless. By the time we reached the foot of our chosen mountain I was pretty tired.

Should we adhere to our original plan or go down to the valley? After discussion and some more food, I decided for the mountain and with some misgivings began the ascent.

I went very slowly, reaching the top, I suppose, at about five o'clock. The view was first-rate; I forget how many counties one saw, but it included the Isle of Man, the Mourne mountains, the nearer Highlands, the mountains of the Lake District and, in the foreground, all the hills of Galloway, a great waste tract with no house in sight. At our foot was a loch, Loch Dee, shining silver in the bright sunlight.

The descent would have been rapid but for my nailless shoes which made running down the steep, grass slopes so difficult that I slid down some hundreds of feet on my backside, wearing a large hole in my trousers in the process.

Once the bottom was reached, I had supposed that there would be a mile and a half to walk back to the car at Craigenallie. I had not, indeed, forgotten that I was using the Bartholomew half-inch to a mile map instead of the accustomed inch to a mile Ordnance Survey but, as always, had failed to make sufficient allowance for the difference in scale. In fact, the distance was considerably over four miles. I was now very tired and the ground seemed rougher than ever. First, we

had to traverse a mile or so of burnt bracken and heather. This, I was told, had been burned deliberately in order to encourage the young grass shoots. It was easier, I suppose, than the unburnt heather, yet the blackened stems were slippery and sufficiently stiff for one's tired feet to trip over them. Also the dreariness of the scene took the spirit out of one. This, moreover, was no flat plain with a straight path across it. Our route lay across a series of low spurs running down from the highlands to the side of the loch. Up one climbed and then down, and this not once but many times, as we tried to steer a middle course between the long arc that curved round the shore of the loch and the straight chord that would have entailed too much climbing and dropping. It was about this time that my host imitated and challenged the cuckoo.

Misery of Hail

It was also about this time—six o'clock, it might be—that a large cloud came up from the north and gradually overspread the sky. I have mentioned that there had been a drought of some three weeks; the bogs were dry, the rivers low, the burns empty. Was it, at long last, going to rain? Probably not, I reflected, knowing well the difficulty it has in raining after a long period of drought. The clouds come up, exude a few drops and pass over, almost as if they were out of practice and had forgotten how to do it. The cloud continued to spread and it grew very cold; suddenly there was a flash of lightning followed by a clap of thunder and something white fell on the ground in front of us. Snow? No, a hailstone, hard and very large.

We were on an exposed stretch of moorland lacking even the vestige of cover. "It will be awful," I said, "if it really starts to hail." "It has started," said my host, and with that the hail came down with a rattle like musketry battering one's head, stinging one's ears and

face, bounding off the ground at one's feet. I had no hat, my hair is growing very thin and the hail impinged directly on my skull. I put up my arms to shield it, but the stones came down so fast and thick that, contrive it as I might, I could not help leaving parts of my head and face exposed. Not to put too fine a point upon it, I was being considerably hurt. This lasted for about ten minutes; then the hail changed to rain, the coldest, I think, I have ever known. I have a good circulation, but my hands quickly grew chilled and turned blue; they began to pain; presently the pain grew acute. In no time I was wet through. The only mitigation of the misery of this evil period was the behaviour of a little dog, Sally, a cocker spaniel who had unaccountably attached herself to me. My host, I should explain, was all this time striding forward, a hundred yards or so ahead, evincing a superb indifference to any plight that I might be in. I admired this behaviour unreservedly, remembering how I used to do the same myself when I was young enough to lead parties and fast enough to outwalk the others. Normally, Sally was where she should have been, at her master's heels, but every couple of hundred yards or so she came running back to see that I was there. And, indeed, I was there, floundering along with my nailless shoes over the stones, blinded with rain, dazed with cold and fatigue. I was delighted to see Sally, spoke to her and tried to induce her to stay with me, but she refused to do so for more than a minute or so at a time. The poor bitch was almost pulling herself in two in her anxiety to link the rear with the advance guard of the expedition. But when it came to the point, she always opted for her master.

I suppose it must have been about 7.30 when we got back to the car. I was footsore, cold and wet, and, as I found to my cost when it came to opening the many gates across the road, I very quickly went stiff. Neither of us had any change of clothing and although the thickness of my host's kilt kept his middle parts passably dry,

I was wet to the skin. It was an hour's drive back to Wigtown and by the time I got to Newton Stewart, I was shivering. Here we got out and each of us had a small tumblerful of neat whisky. I felt better.

At Wigtown my host's wife greeted us precisely as we should have wished. No comment on our lateness, no grumbling talk of spoilt dinners, no exclamations of "Where *have* you been?" Instead, there were condolences on our wetness and our cold, the offer of drinks and a hot bath and an assurance that dinner would be ready in half an hour, the whole implying a tacit acquiescence in the right of husbands to go and come as and when and how they like with no questions asked, an acquiescence proceeding in its turn from a recognition of the fact that what a man wants from marriage is a nice, bright, little home to leave—to my mind, the perfect attitude in a wife.

I peeled off my clothes, collected another small tumblerful of neat whisky and took it to my bath. Enough has already been written about the delights of a hot bath to a man suffering as I was from cold and fatigue. I shall not add to the literature of the hot bath, except to say that while hot baths, taken, as it were in cold blood, for the mere base purpose of cleansing the skin are, to my mind, an enormously overrated form of amusement, a minor sensual satisfaction shamelessly indulged in by those who, denied the major pleasures by lack of charm, or I know not by what other reason, spend half their lives washing the whole of their bodies, taken as I took it now, to warm the cold, to refresh the tired and to soothe the bruised body, the hot bath is a benison. My host did not share the bath. Indomitable man, he had again driven off in the car, this time to Garliestown to collect lobsters. I spent the period of his absence, while dinner was preparing, in bed with a hot bottle. Dazed by fatigue, warmed by the bath, confused by the whisky, I was in a condition between sleep and waking in which I lost consciousness of time without losing consciousness of

self. Is this, I wondered, the state into which the mystics enter? I was just sober enough to assure myself that it almost certainly was not.

Glory of Drink, the Emperor and the D Minor

I came down to dinner feeling like a king. I don't remember in detail what we had, but there were the lobsters, a nice stew which they called a goulash and more whisky. After dinner we played the gramophone. My host's gramophone was not good; he would not, he said characteristically, pay money for a *real* gramophone until a device had been invented which obviated the irritating gaps in the music necessitated by the changing of the records—such a device had, he asserted, been in fact invented, but it had been bought up by the wicked gramophone record makers—and his choice of records was possibly for this reason limited. However, there were the Emperor Concerto and the Bach Piano Concerto in D Minor. We must have them, my host said, in that order. I don't know how often I have heard the Emperor—a score of times at least—but as the superb opening subject came wheezing triumphantly forth from the little old gramophone, I vowed that it had never been so good before. Nor had it. But then never before had I, exalted with whisky, heard it accompanied by a noble man with a great beard and a greater voice who beat time, sang, swayed and even danced to the music. “Now, just listen to this,” he would say. “No, not this, but what's just coming,” and then, when it did come, he would let out a great initial roar in reasonable harmony with the music, a roar which presently modulated itself into a continuous running accompaniment. As always by the slow movement I was moved and mystified, more moved now and more mystified than ever before, and when we came to that thrilling transitional bit at the end which leads on to the third movement, unable to believe that so exalted a mood could last, I tried to prepare myself

against reaction and disillusion, by insisting that the last movement was an anticlimax. "A bit of a let down" is, God help me, what I called it.

But it isn't, of course; anyway, it wasn't then. As the theme repeated itself in all its variations, as the variation with the trills in the treble followed the variation where the piano jumps about all over the orchestra, we grew increasingly excited until, as the climax came, unable to contain ourselves, we started leaping round the gramophone. I think his leaps were in time; I hope that mine were, hope rather than believe, since when we took arms and leapt together, I was out of step, so that his great feet, instead of coming down in time with mine, came down on top of them. Suddenly he stopped; "Look out," he said, putting his finger to his lips, "look out for the three notes on the French horn. Nobody ever notices them, but I, who have played the French horn, assure you they are thrilling. What a man! What genius!" he went on, meaning not himself or myself, but Beethoven. I, of course, had never noticed the three notes on the French horn, but there were as loud as life and until the end of my life I shall never again miss them.

"The Bach," I said, thinking that nothing could beat the Beethoven, "will be an anticlimax." It was not. It was just as big, just as exciting, just as sublime, but big, exciting and sublime, as I ponderously pointed out, in a different way. And, indeed, the first movement of the D Minor with the virile announcement of its noble theme, with those rhythmic lilting passages of development that take your breath, with its crescendos and crashing climax is curiously heady and intoxicating. How the pair of us roared it out in unison and went on roaring it for days afterwards all over the house. Both the first movement and the jocose last; for who would roar the second or, indeed, say anything about it at all, so mysteriously lovely is it, so full of awe and reverence and the suggestion of unseen things very near the surface? Yes, as good as the Emperor, but not better.

Yet both of them better than ever before. Why? The whisky? No doubt that had something to do with it. I was just this side of "tightness," when the world is a fine place and everything is larger than life, when everything seems worth saying, everything worth doing and, what is more to the point, when everything that seems worth doing is also possible to do; when it even seems worth doing to write an account of this day—now that I have written it, I am not so sure. And yet the whisky by itself had not been enough. If I had spent a stock-brokers' day, dormitory-house, car, office, car, dormitory-house again, then, no matter how much I had drunk, that warm glow of the body, that superlative vigour and clarity of the mind, had not supervened. Above all, that little lamp had not been lit in the spirit. I should have sat, all body and no soul, crapulous and sullen or, alternatively, supposititiously hearty, swapping dirty stories or listlessly turning over the pages of a society paper. Even to have been out of doors was not enough; I might have spent the day golfing or lounging in the sun. The effect of the former is not, I think, very different from the effects of car and office, while the virtues of the latter would have depended upon the preoccupations of mind and spirit while the body was lounging. To have walked all day would have ensured at least a serenity of the spirit, a serenity which the whisky would, no doubt, have tinged with a warm glow. Yet I have walked often all day and, though mind and spirit were healed of their wounds, they had not been exalted into glory. No, it was the element of suffering that had played an essential part in the preparation of this beatitude. It was the fact that my feet had been bruised and blistered, that I had been battered and hurt by hail, that I had been chilled to the bone with stinging rain, that I had been tired past bearing—it was all these things in sum which, combined with sun and wind and wide views and wild scenery and the absence of my fellow-men combined, too, no doubt, with the bath, the

whisky and the good food, had so exalted me and blessed the world I lived in.

Now, this rare combination of things, the ardours and endurances, the fatigue, the loneliness in wild country, the consequent uplifting of the spirit, are available in our day only to the walker. Hence, this chapter, besides being a record of a significant day, is also a testimony to the value of that curious blend of blessings which walking alone can confer.

April 27th, 1947

ACTORS AND HORRORS. LITERARY STRULDBRUGS

Actors and Horrors

UP FROM THE FARM yesterday to see Ben Jonson's *The Alchemist*. I had only seen one Ben Jonson play before, *Volpone*. I had not liked it but I had been impressed and encouraged, impressed precisely because it was so cruel and so infernally ugly, encouraged since in our generally depressing times it enabled me to perceive, as I thought, *one* sign of progress. (I don't mean, of course, by "progress" better gadgets, more machines or increased ability to alter and increased speed in altering the position of pieces of matter in space, or increased ability to destroy and to destroy from greater distances, higher altitudes and in greater numbers, human beings and their habitations. I do mean by "progress" greater sensitivity of feeling and greater kindliness of heart, I was going to say "greater humanity," and pulled myself up, remembering what "to be human" means.) *Volpone* is attended by a hunchback, a eunuch and a dwarf and many jibes are levelled against their deformities. I remembered, too, how, in the middle of the comparatively civilised eighteenth century, Fielding, about to embark for Lisbon, tells us that being old and dropsical, he dreaded the jeers of the crowd at his swollen body as he passed through them on his way on board ship. And my thought was that, whereas it was formerly taken for granted that eunuchs and hunchbacks and dwarfs and old men suffering from dropsy were fit subjects for ribald humour, few would now be prepared to make a jest of such physical disabilities. But that was the only comforting thought I took away from *Volpone*.

And so it was with no great expectations either of

elevation or amusement that I went to *The Alchemist*. Even so, the play was a disappointment. First, I could hear very little; certainly I am slightly deaf and am apt to plague my companion at the theatre by whispering fiercely into her ear, "What was that?" "What did he say?" Also, admittedly, like all those who begin to be deaf, I am apt to blame my infirmity upon others, cursing the young because they mumble and actors because they won't speak up. But in this instance my companion seemed not to hear any better than I did and, when I ventured to ask one or two people in the interval, they said they couldn't hear either. Apart from the general decline of audibility in actors, one of the main reasons for our difficulty in hearing was, I think, the speed with which they insisted on speaking. Ben Jonson's splendid but difficult and often archaic language with its strange words, obscure allusions, odd idioms and turns of phrase and unusual grammatical constructions demands to be spoken not faster but more slowly than ordinary modern speech. Yet the actors hustled through the play as if their main concern was to get it over as soon as possible, with the result that it was only with the greatest difficulty that one could catch an occasional phrase. The newly knighted Sir Ralph Richardson, whom I generally hear pretty well and who played Face, was as bad as any of them. In so far as I could follow it, I found the play tedious. There was no development of character. Such as they were at the beginning, so the characters were at the end, and most of them were not characters at all, but only "humours"—that is to say, embodiments of two or three outstanding characteristics abstracted from the general human hotch potch and thrown into high relief by the simple process of leaving all the rest out. There was no plot. Instead, there was a series of incidents which never came to a climax in a *dénouement* or unexpected turn of events. The incidents were, in fact, all variations on a single theme, the theme of quackery and dupery. More

precisely, a couple of quacks tricked a series of dupes out of their money by appealing to their snobbery, cupidity, credulity or lust. *The Alchemist* was called a comedy and there was a certain amount of horse play, but not enough to give one the kind of amusement that one derived from an early Charlie Chaplin film. There was practically no play of ideas and, if there was wit, amid the inaudibility of the actors and the obscurity of the diction, it escaped one.

I take it to be a good rule that ancient tragedies are on the whole better worth seeing than ancient comedies, if only because the former deal with themes of a more universal significance and depend for their appeal less upon contemporary allusions and topical jokes. Certainly Shakespeare's tragedies are easier to understand than his comedies.

For my part, I have come to the conclusion that the only themes that really give me pleasure on the stage are the larks of the mind and the larks of the body. The larks of the mind proceed from an intelligence which is sufficiently master of its ideas to be at play with them and which romps about accordingly among morals, manners, theology, history and philosophy, politics, art and love, treating these topics less as ends in themselves than as occasions for generalisations about the universe in general and about human life in particular. It amuses me to be told that the only way to get rid of a temptation is to yield to it, that man never is but is always to be blest, that he is a fool that marries but a greater that does not marry a fool, that the home is the woman's workhouse and the girl's prison, that

*"Women are like tricks by sleight of hand
Which to admire we should not understand,"*

and so on.

In a word, I like plays of ideas in which there is just enough nonsense, as in Shaw, to prevent us from taking the ideas to heart and just enough sense, as in *The*

Importance of Being Earnest, to ensure that we shall, in fact, take them. Wilde, Congreve, Sheridan and above all, Shaw are dramatically my cups of tea. But in order that the generalisations may keep the mind employed and the epigrams and aphorisms engage the reason, the subjects must be such as are serious and important. I am not amused by jokes about the facetious or the trivial. In the days of my sex-starved youth, bedroom farces and changes of sleeping partners at weekends in country houses did well enough, but now I can only be amused by something that fundamentally matters, which means that I want satire about politics, irreverence about religion or aphorisms about life and love; in a word, I want wit. The larks of the body are afforded by the antics of clown and pantaloone, by the adult equivalent of the sausage and the red-hot poker, by slap-stick. I like to see people with lobster claws attached to their behinds, plates of porridge dispersing themselves over their faces, with their hands caught in mangles or their top hats blown off into the mud; I like, in fact, Charlie Chaplin and Harpo Marx.

But in *The Alchemist* there seemed to me to be very few larks either of mind or of body; a certain amount of simple fun was derived from locking a man up in a lavatory or a coal hole but, for the rest, we were expected to rely for our diversion upon the different methods employed to appeal to the foibles and impose upon the credulity of variously assorted knaves and fools.

I came away with the conviction that, if the play had been written to-day, nobody would have made a fuss about it or bothered to ask himself whether it was a great play or not.

For, quite obviously, it is not. A play by Somerset Maugham, for example, is both more amusing and better put together; it has plot, its characters develop and it leads one to think afresh about the problems of human life and conduct. Yet nobody goes out of his way to maintain that Somerset Maugham is a great playwright.

Literary Struldbrugs

The truth is that Ben Jonson belongs to the class of literary Struldbrugs, people whose works have survived for so long that they find it by now pretty nigh impossible to break themselves of the habit of surviving. Hence, they continue to impose themselves upon successive generations not because of their intrinsic merits but because nobody knows how to kill them off. Since they have survived for hundreds of years, it is taken for granted that they must be good, and as few read them, except the young who study them for examinations, the imposture is not exposed. The intrusion of young women into the fields of literature has given a fresh lease of life to literary Struldbrugs, since young women like what they are told they ought to like and having been informed that Ben Jonson is a great playwright, revere him accordingly. Although women haven't the wit to make the reputation of a writer or an artist they can propagate and preserve it, since, once a man's work has been pronounced good, they regard it as blasphemy to consider on merits whether it is good or not.

Wilhelm Meister is a good example of a literary Struldbrug; it is, I suppose, the dumbest great book that ever went unread. The famous conversations with Eckermann are not much better; both in wit and wisdom, Samuel Butler's *Notebooks* have them hopelessly beaten.

Most Elizabethan tragedies fall within the Struldbugian category. I went, not so long ago to see *The Duchess of Malfi*—sheer melodrama embellished by poetry! What a horrid play. The lid is taken off human nature and all the grosser passions escape out of the pot and cut capers for our edification. This melodrama of murder and treachery, jealousy and rape, moved me no more than the penny dreadfuls which excited my youth, would move me to-day. Webster's preoccupation with sex seemed to my mature and sexually disinterested years merely adolescent. Was the man, I wondered, sexually inhibited? The notion seems odd in its application to an Elizabethan.

One would more naturally have expected it in an allegedly sex-starved Victorian.

I suppose that I am not interested in human nature with the lid off; at least, only a little bit of me is and that bit finds much more solid satisfaction in the literature of the inquisition and the concentration camp than in any of the so-called horrors of the Elizabethan tragedy.

For, judged by the standard of the horrific, *The Duchess of Malfi* simply isn't horrid enough. The characters stab, but they don't torture. When the lunatics are let in on the Duchess in prison, they caper before her, but they don't maul her or rape her. Our generation, brought up on Buchenwald and Belsen, finds its withers completely unwrung by these insipid horrors. They are so much milder than the real thing, as we have learnt to know it. What is the good of expecting us to be horrified by a great lady before whom non-mauling lunatics are paraded? Why isn't she stripped and raped by them severally? Or by animals? Because that kind of thing can't be shown on the stage. I agree that it can't. But, why, then, expect our generation to be horrified or even moved when we know that such things and worse have been done—perhaps still are being done—to thousands of ladies, great and small, and in virtue of our knowledge are inoculated against the thrill of the horrible in art by a reality which outfaces the worst we can think of. Or rather—since perhaps I do injustice to the sadistic flights of our imaginations—by the worst we can present.

For this surely is the contradiction that besets the play or book which relies for its appeal upon violence or sex, namely, that the ultimates of both cannot be presented. You can announce the threat of torture, you can even stage the preparations for carrying out the threat, but you cannot present the torture itself. You cannot show a man being slowly burnt; the audience would faint or be sick. Similarly, you can present girls strip-teasing, but you cannot present them naked;¹ you can present

¹ At least you cannot represent them naked and moving. If they are naked and stationary their exhibition is permitted as being "art."

couples kissing, but not having sexual intercourse, and so on.

And precisely because you can't present the ultimates of love, our age lingers with infinitely prolonged and loving particularity of detail upon the preliminaries, upon everything that happens up to the moment when the lights go down, upon bedrooms and everything connected with bedrooms, upon pyjamas, upon couples getting into and getting out of bed—though not, incidentally, upon couples stationary in bed—upon kissing. . . .

Entering the lift at Hampstead tube station and thence walking on to the platform, I counted recently the number of film advertisements that "featured" pictures of couples. There were twelve of these pictures; eleven depicted two vast faces, male and female, thrust hard and close at each other, either about to kiss, kissing or having just kissed. The only feature that varied in these pictures was the position of the faces. Sometimes the man's was on top and the woman's was held longingly up to it. Sometimes the woman's face showed distaste or hesitation and the man's face was thrust savagely and gloomily—the man by the way invariably frowned and looked cross—at it. Sometimes the man's was down and the woman's was ferociously feeding on his lips. Sometimes they were presented cheek nudged uncomfortably against cheek. . . . To the faces there were, of course, attached the names of different men and women. But always there were these kissing faces.

Now, although the popularity of forms of art which rely upon sexual or, as it is sometimes called, human appeal is, I suppose, more or less permanent, in some ages it seems to be greater than in others. In a civilised age the exploitation of sexual appeal in art is less—in the Greek drama, for example, there is very little emphasis on sex and acts of violence almost always take place off the stage. When an age is Philistine, Puritanical or barbaric, the appeal of sex on the stage or film is more potent and the recourse to it more frequent.

Similarly with horror! The peaceful Victorians craved for the horrid in drama to compensate for its absence from their lives and punctually thrilled over *Sweeney Todd, the Demon Barber of Fleet Street*, and *Maria Martin's Murder in the Red Barn*. But to a generation born in the shadow of the Gestapo and the OGPU, the cutting of throats is chicken feed. I imagine that a man who had spent a week-end in a brothel would find it difficult to excite himself over a strip-tease act; by parity of reasoning, I cannot see why the stranglings and stabbings and eye-gougings, the lunatics and eunuchs and dwarfs of the Elizabethan stage should be expected to move us. They just are not horrible enough for a generation immunised by its familiarity with the horrific in life against the impact of the horrific on the stage, especially when the ultimates of horror, like those of sex, are denied to the artist and the playwright.

April 29th, 1947

NAMELESS SINS AND UNSPEAKABLE VICES

WENT TO SEE THE film of *Dorian Gray* and drew a similar conclusion. I remember what a mysteriously exciting effect the book had upon my generation. When I was growing up Oscar Wilde was wallowing in the trough into which the reputation of great writers falls during the twenty years or so immediately succeeding their deaths. The undergraduates I knew in the Oxford of 1910-1914 took little interest in his plays and no account of his pompous pronouncements about art—in the first flush of our Fabian enthusiasm we were at the exactly opposite end of the æsthetic pole—but we all read *Dorian Gray*. We were, for the most part, very innocent. My guess is that not one in ten of the men I knew in Balliol had ever been to bed with a woman; we numbered among us no obvious homosexuals and we were, to all intents and purposes, teetotallers. I drank cocoa in my rooms and beer once a week in Hall on Sunday evening. Against this blameless background we were all the more thrilled by Wilde's talk of unspeakable vices and nameless sins. What, my inquiringly literal mind used to ask, what on earth was it that Dorian did to make his picture look so disagreeable? I could not even guess, but considering the fuss that was made about the sins and the vices in the book, I knew they must be pretty dreadful.

To-night I saw the film; it was a pretty poor affair by any reckoning with plenty of gaslight and fog and hansom cabs and cobblestones, and all the rest of the Hollywood paraphernalia of Victorian London. As an exhibition of vice it was deplorable. When it came to the point, what did the nameless sins, the unspeakable vices amount to? In the film they amounted to sitting about in

corduroys with a scarf round one's neck drinking spirits in the dimly-lighted bar parlours of east end riverside pubs, playing the piano when half tight, dancing in the same condition with young men—no, on recollection it was not, I think, even with young men that Dorian danced but only with obvious tarts—sitting on the knees of the obvious tarts, or sitting with them on his knee, and presently going mournfully out of the pub door with one or, it may be, with two of them.

Now, of course, the point may be made—I made it in the last entry—that the film was disabled from showing us anything more by the limitations imposed by the censor and the supposed squeamishness of audiences. No doubt. But when I came to think about it afterwards, I saw that in effect there was not much more to present. And there wasn't much more to present simply because the unspeakable vices and the nameless sins don't, in fact, amount to a row of beans. For what, after all, could they have amounted to, but a few sexual perversions with whips and steel rods and a little straight torturing—if, indeed, there is such a thing as straight torturing which is independent of sexual sadism? I suppose, too, that one might ring the changes on the different psychological states produced by varieties of drug taking.

But what small beer is this to a generation accustomed to the strong drink distilled by the Nazis. You can learn more at any rate about one department of unspeakable vices and nameless sins by half an hour's conversation with any survivor from a German concentration camp. In short, the facts of life in Europe over the last ten years have deflated the most extravagant suggestions of Wilde's exuberant imagination and reduced the would-be horrific structure of *Dorian Gray* to lath and plaster. Most of us know this and, knowing it, we can be no more thrilled by the nameless immoralities of Dorian Gray than we can be horrified by the comparatively blameless murders of Sweeney Todd.

All of which brings me back to the puzzle of the attraction exerted by the kissing faces. I am constantly being told that we live in an age of sexual emancipation, and that the young in particular enjoy a sexual freedom which would have seemed to my generation veritably paradisaical. Certainly the Youth Clubs and the Youth Hostels, the week-end holiday camps, the groups of young people to be seen in droves, rambling or cycling about the countryside appear to present an object lesson in freedom from inhibition; they do pretty well as they like with one another without let or hindrance from their elders. Even the members of a week-end Catholic Youth Club, I have recently been assured, take as little account of the possibilities of divine as of adult human displeasure. Yet to look at the films and the advertisements of the films, you would judge that the American and British peoples consisted of sex-starved adolescents for, broadly speaking, American films proceed upon the assumption that the only possible subject of interest is the relation between the sexes. Will they go to bed together, or won't they? If so, when? If not, why not? Is it because of another man or of another woman? Does she really want him, though she pretends not to? Yes, of course, she does. Let us, then, devise some compromising situation—a bedroom, say, the only one in the hotel in which they have contrived to get marooned, or a caravan in remote country where they have to spend the night to shelter from a storm, and he has no pyjamas or she has none. Or, they get shut up together in a lavatory in a train (but perhaps I am wrong here; there may be one of those mysterious American taboos upon lavatories) so let us say they get shut up in the state-cabin of a boat, and the telephone won't work and the lock has gone wrong and the lights go dim and the boat strikes an iceberg or something of the kind and appears to be going down, so that if she doesn't let him have her now, there will never be another chance—a situation, in short, in which her ladylike dissimulations and hesitations

will go down like chaff before the wind of the raw impulses of human nature—you know the sort of thing, all of it based, isn't it, upon the implied premise that the sexual relations between men and women are the only possible subjects of human interest? And so, I dare say, they are, if men and women don't have any; if, for example, they are convicts, or ascetics, or nuns, or school-boys, or concentration camp inmates. But not, you would suppose, if they are young persons coming to maturity in our own age in which sex is as cheap and as easily come by as horror. Why, then, do the films go on about it with such punctual monotony. Or is it only in my own class that sex is cheap and easy to come by? Or among students? Or among immoral artists? Don't the lower middle classes have as much of it as they want; don't even the working classes? Or is it that most women who together with adolescents and children form the bulk of cinema going audiences, don't have it, or don't have as much of it as they want, or don't have the right kind? I don't know. What I do suggest is that there is a puzzle here.

Reading through the above—and it has been a long entry for a man coming home late at night after seeing so sleep-inducing a film as *Dorian Gray*—two points strike me as worth following up. First, on the question of reality putting fictional vice and horror out of court, is this the reason why our age is without satire? Satire is the gilding of the lily of human folly and vice; it is a going one better than reality. But there are some lilies which can't be gilt; they are literally blazing already. Writing in an age of comparative decency, Swift could satirise the power politics and hypocritical rationalisations of warring eighteenth-century States and the reader is duly outraged. But what, one wonders, could he say now which would be more grotesque than the facts? You cannot go one better than the reality which worships the science that discovers the atom bomb, and flocks in its thousands to picture palaces to gape with wondering

admiration at films which portray the ever increasing efficiency of the means which are being prepared for its own destruction. This sort of thing puts the satirist out of work and countenance. It is no accident, I think, that only one work of first-rate satire has been produced in our time, Orwell's *Animal Farm*.

Secondly, on literary Struldbrugs, is *The Pilgrim's Progress* a candidate? Are Smollett's novels? Are *Evelina* and *Camilla*? Will the novels of Henry James qualify? It is only the fear lest my pen should turn and rend me for blasphemy that prevents me from adding to the list of possible candidates, Hamlet. But no, I dare not cite Hamlet.

May 3rd, 1947

HAMLET AS A LITERARY STRULDBRUG. A MIDSUMMER-
NIGHT'S DREAM. ON LEAR

Hamlet as a Literary Struldbrug

YES, I DARE, for I have just been to see the play and, although people will be very angry with me, and though I know quite well how they will get me both ways for it, I will speak. (What are the both ways? They will say, first, "How dare Joad attack this greatest of plays by the greatest of men? What impertinence!" They will say, secondly—the more knowing ones—"Look at Joad, giving himself marks and thinking himself the hell of a fellow for his outrageous audacity in attacking Hamlet. But all that is *vieux jeu*, mere schoolboy iconoclasm; we've *all* done it in our time"—not that they have by the way, Shakespeare in general and *Hamlet* in particular being at the moment exceeded in sacro-sanctity only by the Royal Family.

Besides, there is another point of interest that I want to explore, analogous to the eye-meeting point which I went into last February. The question that inevitably interests me is how far I am like, how far unlike other people. As you can never be anybody else, there is no certain way of finding out since you have never had anybody else's experiences to compare your own with; so you have to do the best you can with chance indications and general inferences.

On the whole I have come to the conclusion that the degree of my difference from most people exceeds the average of most people's difference from one another; or, to put it more briefly, that my reactions to many things don't conform to popular patterns. In this matter of *Hamlet*, for example . . . (But, of course, I may be

quite wrong about this and it may be the case that most people neither like *Hamlet* nor pretend to—which on reflection is of course obvious—that most of those who pretend to like it don't like it really, being consciously hypocritical and anxious to say what they believe to be the right thing, while others, who are not hypocritical, think they like it but don't really like it any more than the hypocrites, having kidded themselves into the belief that they like what they don't like, because other people like it and they think they ought to like what other people do, or because it is "great art" and, of course, they respect "great art." But because I am not sure whether any of these hypotheses is true, I want to set out my own reactions and see if there are any in whom they ring the bell.)

When I was a boy, I was thrilled by *Hamlet* because of the ghost and especially by his second appearance in the Queen's chamber. Afterwards the ghost lost his power to horrify.

When I saw it last night, I had not seen it for several years, perhaps a dozen and I was surprised to find how long the play lasted—three and a half hours—and to notice that for most of the time I was bored. Why, I asked myself, do people make such a fuss about the play?

Partly, I suppose, because of the so-called mystery of Hamlet's character. The point is, I take it, that you are never quite sure what manner of man Hamlet is, or whether he is mad or only pretending, and people find this uncertainty intriguing. But more to the point is the fact that, as it seemed to me, Shakespeare did not know either. Perhaps that is why he makes Hamlet talk so interminably. The man will never have done with explaining himself. Having discovered by the King's behaviour at the performance of the play that he has murdered his father, Hamlet, one might suppose, would confront him with the fact and kill him off. Instead of that, he has a scene with his mother, whom he accuses of

incest and God knows what else, because she has married her dead husband's brother. (In parenthesis why shouldn't one marry one's dead husband's brother? It is neither forbidden in law nor reprobated in morals. Perhaps it was forbidden in Elizabethan English law—I don't know. But after all the play is about Denmark of no known date, not about England in the sixteenth century.) Of course, if she had known that her second husband had killed her first, the situation would have been different and by marrying the second husband she would be conniving at the murder of the first. But there is not a tittle of evidence to show that she did know, or at any rate that she knew *when* she married the second husband, and anyhow it isn't with complicity in murder that Hamlet charges her. During most of the second half of the play he is making opportunities to kill the King and then explaining at enormous length why he doesn't take advantage of them.

Hamlet's morals are in general as infirm as his purposes. Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are sent with him to England charged with letters from Hamlet's uncle to the English King asking him to kill Hamlet. This is represented as very wicked of them—Hamlet calls them "baser natures"—though they are, in fact, only doing their duty by their employer, the king, who is, presumably, paying them well to carry out his instructions. Hamlet steals the letter and, "his fears, forgetting manners," opens it and proceeds to show his disapproval of the king's conduct by imitating it, forges a letter signed with his dead father's seal asking the king of England to kill not himself, Hamlet, but Rosencrantz and Guildenstern and substitutes it for the original letter without apparently a qualm of conscience. And that apparently is the end of this much maligned couple who, after all, are only carrying out orders as instruments of another's purpose.

For my part, I cannot help thinking that all this is rather shabby conduct on Hamlet's part, an opinion

apparently shared by the good Horatio who, though we are explicitly told that he was made privy to what Hamlet had done, nevertheless is so ashamed of it that right at the end of the play he feels constrained to tell lies about it, assuring the English ambassador that Hamlet never commanded the death of R. and G.

As to whether he is mad or not, I found the whole question rather tiresome. Frankly I did not and don't care, precisely because I am not sufficiently interested in *Hamlet* itself. I have read some of the commentators on this topic and find them even more boring than the play.

As for the other characters, with the exception of the good Horatio and the simple Laertes, they are all more or less dislikeable. The grave digger, like most of Shakespeare's comic wisecrackers, I found largely unintelligible. What twisted and recondite humour!

The emotional or should it be the *moral* content of the play is commonplace. *Hamlet* is a drama of very ordinary human passions. No doubt when you are young and you meet them for the first time, the cruder human passions, jealousy and hatred and revenge, lust and spite and aggression and the desire for power are interesting enough. You want to find out all that you can learn about them, you even want to experience them yourself. "*That*," you assure yourself from the depths of the armchair in which you are reading your books for the forthcoming examination, "*that* would be something like; *that's* the real stuff; life in the raw *that* is, contrasting 'that' unfavourably with the grey uneventfulness of life in your academic cloisters. And then, still out of the depths of your armchair and your inexperience, you flirt with some doctrine to the effect that intense and exquisite emotions are the things to go for in life; that "not the fruits of experience but experience itself is the end"; that one ought to live out to the full extent of every side of one's nature, that even suffering is to be embraced in the interests of full and vital living, and much more to

the same effect. . . . But when you are older and have had some, you realise that the passions have their disadvantages of which the most immediately relevant are their squalor and their sameness. With what wearisome reiteration the phases of a love affair, for example, repeat themselves. The suspense of "Will she?", the excitement of "She will," the joy of possession, the anti-climax of the aftermath, the boredom of subsequent day to day contact when the heights have been left behind and the sobered couple must walk the pedestrian flats of everyday life.

Hence though you can by no means escape from their actual domination, the passions as you grow older cease to be interesting. You suffer from them; you are in bondage to them and resent your bondage; you still intermittently enjoy them, but they are no longer, for you, subjects for interested exploration, which means that they no longer intrigue you in books and plays, or even when they make their appearance by proxy in romantic music. Certainly it is not their unfolding and development that you would choose for the stuff of your peculiar delight in art. Art, you think, should tell you something that you *don't* already know; suggest to you standards that are *higher* than those which you normally observe in your own life, introduce you to refinements of feeling you have not experienced and did not, perhaps, know were possible. Art, in fact, should ennoble you or civilise you or elevate you or develop you or enlarge the scope and awareness of consciousness.

Now *Hamlet* is primarily a drama of revenge, at once one of the most dislikeable and the most monotonous of all human passions. It is dislikeable because it puts people beside themselves and reduces the infinite variety of human nature to a single all embracing preoccupation. It is monotonous because even more surely than most human passions it follows the same repetitive round of familiar phases, the injury, the anger and resentment at the injury, the determination to requite the injury by

repeating it, the moment of satisfaction, the dust and ashes of the aftermath.

If the staple topic of the play is uninteresting, its moral is ambiguous, amounting as it does to not much more than an *exposé* of the method of repaying evil with a similar evil and its results. Whether these are represented as deplorable or justificatory is not altogether clear. I doubt if Shakespeare knew himself, or cared very much about the morals of the play one way or the other.

Nor is that all. Plato's *Republic* contains an interesting criticism of tragic art on the ground that, whereas in ordinary life we count it the mark of a brave and good man that he does not make a song over his misfortunes and go about crying over spilt milk, the essence of a tragic character consists in doing precisely these things. The more eloquent the song, the more lamentable and prolonged the crying, the higher the reputation of the tragedy.

Plato's attitude carries emotional austerity to excess, but one can see his point. We should not insist too much on our misfortunes or we risk boring one's audience; we should not bewail our woes too vociferously, or we run the risk of lowering their morale.

But in *Hamlet* the characters insist and bewail without stint or scruple from the play's beginning to its end, especially Hamlet himself. What a washing of dirty psychological linen! What an unfolding of ugly secrets, and as for crying over spilt milk, Hamlet simply cannot "forget it." How he does go on about his dead father; about his varied excellences, as if a man acquired virtue simply through contriving to get himself murdered, and about his own resolve to be revenged, as if there were something admirable in showing one's disapproval of a course of action by proposing to emulate it.

I shall be told that the language in which all this is expressed is among the most glorious in our literature. How eloquent, in fact, and how wise are the famous speeches. I agree that they are eloquent, being in fact

jewels of language which shine with the glory of some of the most magnificent poetry with which my wits have ever been dazzled. But surely they are better read. When you read them, you can both dwell on the metaphors and similes with which Shakespeare delighted to enrich his speech and go back and read again the passages that enthralled you. At the play you can do neither of these things. Moreover, it is rarely that an actor speaks the lines well enough for you to be able to catch every word. Even if you do, many of the words are so strange, many of the allusions so recondite, that with the best will in the world you simply cannot understand all that is said, as you go along. Admittedly, when you read to yourself, you miss some part of the glorious music of the words but then, if it is music you want, you would be better advised to go to a concert.

As to the wisdom, I have two comments. First, it has been staled into platitude by overfamiliarity. Just as one can overdo one's hearing of a piece of music, Beethoven's Fifth Symphony, for example, and by misuse take the wonder out of it, so you can hear saws and maxims, tropes and preachments so often and come to know them so well that they are robbed of all freshness and tang of meaning, and like used coins lose the image and superscription which gave them their distinctive significance.

And when all is said, is the wisdom so very wise after all? By the higher standards, the standard of Socrates or Plato or Aristotle or Christ or Pascal or Shaw, I suggest that it isn't. The power of expression is tremendous, but what is expressed is for the most part commonplace stuff. That the sky is blue, that in spring the grass is green, that nobody knows what will happen tomorrow, that all men are mortal, that being in love is exciting but painful, that young men are apt to have their way with young women and then to leave them in the lurch, that the ways of God are incomprehensible but just, and the ways of women neither just nor comprehensible but charming, that not all rich men are happy,

that princes are ungrateful and capricious and that those who enjoy power forget those who put them in power, that ambition will stick at nothing, that murder will "out," that life is an enigma which is on balance, unpleasant, but that we are, nevertheless, afraid of death—these, and sentiments like these, form the intellectual stock in trade of some of the greatest poetry in the world. And in saying this I am taking the stuff of *Hamlet* at its best; some of it, for example, the Player King's speech is, I insist, frankly boring.

The plot of *Hamlet* is certainly not calculated to suggest that this generally adverse judgment needs revision. The play consists for the most part of a series of detached scenes. There are the scenes with the ghost, the scenes of rehearsal with the Players—almost entirely irrelevant and boring because much too long—the play scene, the scene in the Queen's room, the graveyard scene and so on. It is difficult to obtain a general view of the play's action and development; indeed, most of the time one does not know what is going on or why it is going on. I have been told by those who make it their business to enquire into such things that the play embodies three separate stories which have been, as it were, thrown together, but have not been woven together. However that may be, the parts don't dovetail, nor are the joins cemented, while loose ends and frayed edges are left about all over the play. I get the impression that Shakespeare wasn't sufficiently interested in his play to go to the trouble of tidying them up.

The Fortinbras passages in particular suggest matter which has been intruded but never assimilated. What, for example, is the point of Fortinbras's alleged conquest of Poland?

Again, Hamlet starts for England, but apparently never gets there owing to his capture by pirates. How long is he away? It is difficult to say, the references to this journey of his being exceedingly obscure. There are passages which suggest that he has been absent for a

considerable time—for example, in the grave-digger scene he shows ignorance of what has been going on in his absence—nor is the chronological relation between the time of his return and Ophelia's death ever made clear. At first, one is tempted to think that a considerable interval has elapsed between these two events. But if so, the corpse of Ophelia would have long decomposed and either have been buried or have become unfit for burial. Yet Hamlet turns up in time to see it buried and there is no suggestion that anybody is bothered by the odours of decomposition; on the contrary, Laertes jumps into the grave and embraces the body. A close reading, however, suggests that she may have died only just before Hamlet's return to Denmark with the pirates, in which case the corpse would have incommoded nobody. But Shakespeare has not been at pains to make the chronology of these events as clear as one could wish, and having looked at the play yet again, I am far from certain what really happens or when it happens. It may be said that such ambiguities and discrepancies of detail are not very important and do not much detract from the value of the play, but we must remember that this is the most admired play of all time and that we are, therefore, entitled to judge it by a severer standard than that applicable to ordinary plays. What the discrepancies and confusions suggest to me is that Shakespeare never thought very much about the play one way or the other and could not, therefore, be at pains to revise it by pruning the *longeurs* and removing the inconsistencies, a view which seems to me to receive countenance from the chaos of slaughter at the end. It is just as if Shakespeare had had enough of his characters and had decided to polish them off, doing the job in such a slapdash way that he hasn't even troubled to make it clear how Hamlet himself gets killed. Is it Laertes's poisoned sword, or the poisoned cup which he insists on drinking? I am not curious, as Lottie Venn used to say, but I do like to know.

The net conclusion is that I don't think *Hamlet* worth

all the words I have expended on it, nor, indeed, should I have expended so many did not the play, for me, raise another question. Have I a blind spot? Do I simply fail to see qualities of excellence, eximious virtues which are immediately apparent to everybody else? For clearly, if I am right, a vast imposture has been practised for the best part of a century upon generations of innocent theatre-goers. I must admit that, *prima facie*, it seems more probable that I am wrong. Not liking the idea, I must contrive to do the best I can to make the imposture hypothesis less unpalatable by reminding myself, (i) that most people are, in fact, incurably conventional and can easily be kidded into saying and thinking that they like something that they don't like merely because other people say that they like it, or because they think that liking it is a mark of taste and distinction and something, therefore, that they ought to go in for, and (ii) that there have been considerable periods when Shakespeare in general and *Hamlet* in particular were very far from commanding the uncritical adulation that they command to-day—in the eighteenth century, for example, whose taste we are accustomed to commend. I reinforce consideration (i) by drawing attention to the hold which actors exert upon the public. After all, most people and nearly all women go to the theatre not to see a play but to see persons acting. "Have you seen so and so?" the lady asks. "Isn't that the play Blank is in?" replies her friend. "No, I haven't seen it yet, but I am going next week. I think he's wonderful. Don't you?"

Now, I can well imagine that actors enjoy doing *Hamlet* above all other plays. There is the play's prestige; there are the frequent dramatic situations; there are the controversy over Hamlet's character, the classical interpretations of the Hamlet rôle in the past and the scope for a different interpretation in the present with its seductive challenge to intrude the actor's personality between the lines of the playwright's text, even if they are lines which are not there. Above all, the part is so

long that an actor cannot but enjoy a sense of achievement in remembering it all and getting to the end of it. After all, to play Hamlet is a feat of endurance even if it is nothing else, and the actor who has endured to the end, cannot help feeling pleased with himself. These, I take it, are some of the reasons why actors like playing Hamlet.

As they want to do it themselves, it is only natural that they should do their best to engender the conviction in potential audiences that they want to see them do it; hence, everybody combines to foster the belief that *Hamlet* is an unsurpassed and unsurpassable play.

I have been so carried away by my reaction to the prevalent habit of rating the actors above the play—actors, I hold, should be seen and not heard; but this, on reflection, is precisely what they are and what I have just been complaining of them for being, so, I suppose, what I really mean is that actors should not intrude themselves between the play and the audience by parading their own personalities. The excellence of an actor is, for me, the same as the excellence of a woman, as defined at the end of Pericles's funeral speech, that she should be least spoken of either for good or for evil among the men—I have, I say, been so carried away by this reaction of mine that I see I have almost forgotten to mention the actors.

The production which has provoked these pages of comment was a production by and of John Gielgud. Gielgud, that is to say, acted Hamlet besides producing the play. I found him an unsatisfactory Hamlet; he had a gibing, rasping voice and his accent and intonation were often finicking, as though Hamlet were a contemporary intellectual. He gave one the impression that Hamlet was an angry, irritable chap; also a very fidgety chap who threw himself about and couldn't sit still. Not for a moment could Gielgud keep still. He wriggled, writhed and at times buzzed about the stage like an angry wasp. Moreover, like most contemporary actors, he was extremely difficult to hear.

Now, if you can't hear Shakespeare's words you might just as well not be there; and that my ability not to hear Gielgud wasn't just due to deafness was proved by the fact that I could hear Sofaer, who played the King, very well and I could hear Trouncer, who was the Player King with delighted ease. What a voice! What excellence of enunciation! For this, surely, is the first requisite in an actor, that he should be audible. How few meet it! How triumphantly Trouncer met it!

A Midsummer-Night's Dream

If I had not written so much about Hamlet, I should go on to enquire whether perhaps Shakespeare is not in general over-rated. I would not presume to class him with the literary Struldbrugs, but is he as much better than all the rest of them, as we commonly rate him? I wonder. Some of his plays give me intense pleasure, notably *A Midsummer-Night's Dream*, but how much of this is due to subjective factors of association and nostalgic harkings back to my youth, I don't know. I have seen the play several times out of doors, usually at the height of summer, when the air was full of scents and warm with a long day's sunlight. It has been played in some well-kept garden on soft, clipped grass, the foreground of the stage a great mass of banked flowers, its sides and back, hedges of greenery. (I once saw it in a glade in the New Forest.) Before the performance I have dined well, enjoyed wine and good talk. There have been times when I have seen it with a girl—I mean, at one time with one girl, at one time with another—with whom I have been in love, and the play has got all mixed up with the scent of her hair and the glint of her eyes shining in the half-light from the stage. And almost always there has been music coming as it were by accident out of the heart of the play, which has moved me strangely. For that surely is how beauty most often comes to one—not as something prepared and waited for, but unexpectedly like a song that one hears as one passes

the hedge rising suddenly and softly into the night. I am not including in the category of such incidental music Purcell's music to the masque, *The Faery Queen*. For *The Faery Queen* is not the *Midsummer-Night's Dream* at all, but only a stylised extract from it, and the Purcell music is so glorious that it cannot help but occupy the centre of artistic interest, playing, for me, what is left of Shakespeare right off the stage. I have twice heard Purcell's music to *The Faery Queen* and on each occasion thought it entrancing. There is a particular motif which one hears when Puck squeezes the magic flower into the eyes of the sleeping lovers which is for me among the most magical moments in music. Why don't we English make more fuss of Purcell, our greatest man after Shakespeare? It isn't as if we were so rich in musicians of the first-class; indeed, after Purcell there is nobody, though there are one or two before him.

The point I am making is that all these associative and nostalgic factors have invested *A Midsummer-Night's Dream* for me with an adventitious glamour which may well give it a value out of all proportion to its intrinsic merits. Something of the same attraction is also exerted, though less strongly, by *As You Like It* and *Twelfth Night*. Both plays are mixed up with English lovers, English lanes, English woodlands and the spring. Now, though I am obtuse to poetry, I like to think that I enjoy the flowers and the lanes, the woods and the spring as much as anybody.

But what I have written about *Hamlet* might apply with equal justice to most of the other great tragedies—to *Macbeth*, for example, or *Othello*. None of the three is in my view sufficiently exalted in theme to produce the elevating and purifying effects which Aristotle claims for tragedy.

On Lear

I do, however, ascribe this power to *Lear*. I don't like *Lear*. I know very well that the play is not my

artistic "cup of tea" and yet, and yet I am impressed—no, more than impressed, overwhelmed—in spite of myself. I ascribe this effect to the greater generality of *Lear's* theme; for while the themes of *Hamlet* and *Macbeth* are the struggle of man against man, that of *Lear* is the struggle of man against the universe, or against Fate, or the angry gods, or whatever you like to call it. For this reason *Lear* is more like a tragedy by Aeschylus or Sophocles than any other of Shakespeare's plays. For the man's fault is, after all, trivial to have provoked such a terrific reprisal. (I say "trivial," but shouldn't the word rather be "ambiguous?" I am never wholly clear what *Lear's* sin is, nor, I take it, is anybody else, since if they were, so many commentators would not have expended so many pages in telling us.) And so Regan and Goneril and the rest are less persons in their own right, than instruments of an affronted fate, cogs in the wheels of cosmic, moral machinery. Perhaps, like the Book of Job, the purpose of the play is to give us an object lesson in the insignificance of man. . . .

May 6th, 1947

THE EROICA. THAT ART IS IMITATION

The Eroica

THE ABOVE SUGGESTS a more general reflection to which a performance of the Eroica Symphony which I have just attended gives point and illustration. The reflection is that art of the highest order is not about the human at all, but is always about the non-human; is, in fact, about the universe. The Third Symphony of Beethoven is not by any means my favourite. I think the first movement rather dull and too long, the shortish first subject being not substantial enough to carry the tremendous tapestry of sound which is educed from and woven around it.

The second movement I find lowering which, perhaps, since it is about death, is what it is intended to be. At any rate it, too, goes on much too long and at the end one is pretty thoroughly imbued with the conviction that whatever makes life gay, larky and friendly is being snuffed out, or that, if it isn't yet, it soon will be. There are to be no more ham and eggs, no more pints of beer or bottles of Burgundy, no more flowers in spring, no more bonfires in autumn, no more parties at which you are the great man, no more love-making, no more speech-making and being clapped for your speeches, no more matey talks over the fire before going to bed with somebody that you have known for a long time. One by one all these jolly, pleasant things, all the things which make the colour and the warmth of life, are blotted out, like stars which disappear behind a spreading cloud, and things get drearier and drearier, and you wish you were dead. At any rate you wish that the movement would stop and when at last it does, you feel very depressed and lowered indeed, especially if you happen

to have heard the thing, as I did this time, in that awful Albert Hall. My depression was not unlike that which I used to experience as a young man in a provincial town on a Sunday morning, with everything closed and nowhere to go.

Suddenly amid the gloom there perks up the light-hearted measure of the scherzo. It is just as if a pretty, young housemaid had come tripping into an old room which has long been shut up and it is very stuffy in consequence. It is a spring morning; she goes to the window, pulls the curtains, opens the shutters and lets in the air and sunlight. Outside the birds are singing. The motes dance in the sunbeams as she dusts the heavy furniture, takes down the pictures of Victorian worthies and admires herself in the long mirror. What fun it all is, the fun of relief from oppressive boredom. At last, it seems, there is something to do which is worth doing; for life is supremely well worth living; one can go out into the sunshine or run after the housemaid and, even if one does not find her it doesn't much matter, for one is too light-hearted to be cast down by a little thing like that.

Thus, by the time the last movement has started we are in a different world, a sunshiny, light-hearted world, where all the interest lies on the surface.

The fourth movement introduces us to yet another world, a world of heights and depths which is both exciting and exalting. Unfortunately, we can say nothing about it, for this world is not in time at all, and language has been devised to enable us to communicate meanings appropriate to a world in time. So when we ask what it is that the last movement is affirming, we can only answer in negatives. It says, then, nothing about stars going out or curtains being drawn aside or housemaids or sunlight. Indeed, it says nothing about nature or the human at all; the emotion that it arouses is not like the emotion aroused by anything human and the patterns and sequences of sound, though exquisitely

lovely and moving, do not remind one of anything in this world; nor do they depend for the pleasure which they give upon any subjective association or nostalgic longing. They are wholly *sui generis* and the emotions they arouse are, therefore, unique, being specifically musical emotions, the emotions we feel for sequences and combinations of sound and for nothing else. Moreover, we feel that this last movement is somehow more important than anything that has gone before. Now, this importance is derived not, I am suggesting, from life and the human but from the universe and the non-human.

That Art is Imitation

I have a notion that all thought and art which belongs to the highest category, from Plato's *Timæus* to Shakespeare's *Tempest*, from Thucydides's *History* to Shaw's *Back to Methusaleh*, from Bach's Double Violin Concerto in D Minor to the last movement of the *Eroica* is fundamentally a statement about the universe. It contrives, that is to say, to express according to its medium something of what man has discerned about the nature of things. What it expresses we cannot say, for if the attempt were made to convey it, we would be driven to admit that we have at our command no words with which to improve on those of Plato and Thucydides and Shakespeare and Shaw. If it is conveyed in paint or sound, it cannot be transferred to any other medium. I use the word "discern" deliberately, because the greatest artists do not, as it seems to me, create what is not; what they do is to discern what is. After all, man does not really create anything; he does not even imagine; at least, he does not imagine anything that is new. What is called imagination is the rearrangement of material already given. Who, for example, would have thought of trees or rain or sound or the sky or ice or sun or the colour green? Or again, who would have thought of a catkin or the smell of a bonfire of dead leaves? These things are not thought of by us; they were

given to us as the raw material for our so-called imaginations to work on. What we proceed to do is to rearrange this material, transposing the head of a man and the body of a horse, or sticking a spiked pole in the middle of an animal's forehead and then calling the centaur and the unicorn the products of our imagination. Again, we can mix colours in order to produce combinations of colour other than those given to us by nature or juxtapose shapes in novel ways, and as a result produce the colouring of Van Gogh, or the pictures of Dali. But the colours combined and the shapes juxtaposed are themselves given to us by nature.

All art is I think at bottom an imitation of the subject matter that nature provides. This being so, the question is, what is the artist to imitate. Some—perhaps most—prefer to imitate the human; it is easier; to most of us it is more interesting and we certainly know more about it. Novelists in general and one might, I think, safely add women novelists in particular, take the human as their exclusive province. So for the most part do the poets, especially the poets of love; metaphysical poetry, that of Vaughan, for example, or Traherne, and Nature poetry being exceptions. At least, Nature poetry is an exception if Nature is treated, as it was most notably by Wordsworth, as a veil which on occasion thins like a shifting mist, and can be pulled aside to reveal the reality which shines through it.

The great tragic dramatists exhibiting the workings of that moral machinery by which overweening arrogance brings disaster and Milton, justifying the ways of God to man, also contrived to say something about that non-human cosmos in which our lives are set. In other words, they "imitated" the non-human rather than the human. So most magnificently does Shakespeare in *King Lear* and even more obviously in parts of *The Tempest*. But so does he not in *Hamlet*, where the interplay of human passions occupies the attention to such effect that, as far as I can see, no moral of any kind

touching the nature of a world in which human beings so feel and so behave emerges.

I take it that, as one gets older, one's interest in human character wanes - after all, by the time one has reached fifty one knows, or thinks one does, most of the combinations or permutations of the constituents of human nature—and one's interest in this extremely puzzling universe in which human life is set waxes, which is perhaps why the later works of the greatest writers show a diminishingly human and dramatic interest—one thinks, for example, of the *Timaeus*, the *Laws* and *The Tempest*—and why music, which starts with the advantage of not being very obviously about this world at all, is pre-eminently the old, as poetry is the young, man's art.

May 8th, 1947

HUMILIATIONS AT THE FARM. NON-PREHENSILENESS OF THE HANDS. NON-COMPREHENSION OF THE MACHINES. TOO OLD TO LEARN. FRUSTRATIONS AND DISQUIETUDES

Humiliations at the Farm

TO THE FARM! I ought to have said something about the farm before, since for the last six months—in fact, ever since November 11 last year when I took it over—it has been the major interest in my life.

There have been several occasions on which I might have made an entry before, but I funk'd them, knowing that, once I started on the farm, there would be no end to it. But since I cannot after all put in everything and since I am at a loss for any principle of selection which would show me what to put in and what to leave out, I have now decided to put in whatever happens to strike me most forcibly at the moment, which in a diary is as it should be. What strikes me most forcibly at *this* moment is my humiliation, a humiliation which has been continuous ever since I came to the farm and which this morning reached a climax. It arises from four causes.

First, there is my general undifferentiated unpracticality. This unpracticality of mine is, I suppose, largely congenital but it has been unnecessarily exacerbated by my way of life. There are a number of things which most people seem to be able to understand, a number of activities which they seem able to carry out by the light of nature, which I don't understand and can't carry out at all. Or, I learn and learn to do them only with great difficulty, after which by carefully observing all the rules and doing exactly what I have been told to do, I manage to get through them slowly and inefficiently yet without absolute disaster, as for example, in the matter of knocking in nails, tying up parcels, making

knots, scything grass, making a fire or a seat, tapping a barrel, filling or emptying a cask, laying a carpet, hanging a picture, cooking a meal, cleaning boots and shoes, putting on a halter, bridling a horse, baiting a hook, killing and gutting a rabbit or a bird, in all of which I am by nature quite exceptionally incompetent. All my life I have avoided doing these things, mainly, I suppose, because I knew I was so bad at them and wanted, so far as might be, to avoid making a public exhibition of myself. Thus, my initial incompetence has been exaggerated by a life-time of disuse.

And now, I suppose, I am too old to learn. For example, until I came to the farm, I had never made a bed, cleaned my shoes or laid a fire. I did not like to confess in this democratic age that I did not know how to do these things, and set about trying to do them for myself until my incompetence became so glaringly manifest, that somebody or other took pity on me and did them for me.

When I came to reflect upon the matters afterwards, it suddenly struck me that the only material things whose properties and behaviour I had had occasion minutely to examine were paper, nibs, pencils, ink and blotting paper. With these I have had to do all my life with the result that I know more or less how and where paper will tear, when ink will run and clot, how pencils break when they are sharpened, how much or rather how little blotting paper will absorb and how much it will generally fail to absorb when you expect it to. I know the feel and qualities of different kinds of paper, which pencils make clear black marks without undue pressure from the hand and with what nibs I can write with only relative illegibility. I know these things now so well that I have no longer to put a particular piece of paper or a particular nib to the empirical tests of experiment and observation, just as I have come to know how food will taste by looking at it. But in regard to no other kinds of material things do I possess the instructed knowledge that is born of personal experience. Hence, mine is not

only a deficiency in the matter of practical performance, but also in the matter of practical knowledge. I don't know what are the properties and capacities of things and I don't know how to set about doing a job which involves their manipulation.

The farm is set upon upper greensand which, when wet, produces a very plentiful and exceptionally adhesive mud. To cope with this I was accordingly given a pair of Wellingtons; I had never worn Wellingtons before. When I came to put them on, I put them on under the legs of my trousers. It was pointed out to me not only that this was wrong, but that I was the first person in the experience of anybody present who had been known to attempt such a thing. Everybody else knew apparently by the light of nature that they went on *over* the trousers.

This general unpracticality, then, is chiefly evinced in an inability to understand the ways and properties of material things, to divine how in any particular circumstances they are likely to behave and to discover the easiest way of approaching and tackling them.

Non-Prehensileness of the Hands

It is reinforced by two special disabilities. The first of these—it is also the second main cause of my humiliations—is an inability to use my hands. My hands are very small and almost useless; the fingers are stubby and small, the nails break easily, the skin is soft and tears. Yet the hands, so small and weak are, nevertheless, clumsy. To all intents and purposes these appendages of my body, these terminals of my organism—I don't know how else to describe them, for they scarcely deserve the title of limbs in their own right—are non-prehensile. Since for years I have never had occasion to use my hands, except for familiar and simple operations, I have gone through life largely unaware of the extent of my disability which was, moreover, masked by my relative skill at games. I had a true, quick eye, a good sense of balance, and could run pretty fast. Hence, I contrived

to hit balls in the middle of bats, sticks and racquets with the right amount of force to induce them to travel at the right speeds in the required directions to the intended spots. Because I could play tennis and hockey reasonably well and because, for the rest, I was a sedentary worker upon whom maids waited and for whom the world was spread with food four times a day, I went through years of my life without realising that my hands didn't work properly. Then I grew too old to walk long distances and took to riding. Immediately my disability was made clear to me by my discovery that I could neither sort out, put on or manage without aid the incredibly complicated harness of a horse. I could not disentangle and put in position the innumerable bands and straps, insert bits or manipulate halters. My fingers simply wouldn't perform the operations required to put the spikes of buckles in the appropriate holes or dislodge the spikes of the buckles that others had inserted.

Now, on the farm there are always things to do with one's hands, things to make, things to mend, things to adjust, things to improvise, and I am no good at them at all. The veriest dreamer or poet, the most finicking dandy or doll is better than I. I daresay that it is in my impatience with objects that partly accounts for my inability to deal with them. Instinctively I attribute to things the possession of wills and spirits of their own which cause them to behave in irritating and frustrating ways, thwarting my purposes with malignity and on occasion furthering them without benevolence. The soap that slithers in the bath, the paper that flaps in the wind, the fishing lines that entangle themselves in knots, the laces that break, the corks that crumble, the things that make a point of losing themselves, or roll under beds and chests of drawers, whence they can't be recovered—all these are instinctively regarded by me as the embodiments in action of mischievous and thwarting spirits. "There it is, trying to get away from me, as usual; and caught red-handed," I say to myself of the stud or

whatever it may be that is detected and stamped on and usually smashed as a result, but anyway stopped in the act of rolling under the chest of drawers. If I could manage to control studs and links and keys and locks and screws and nails, I shouldn't be so ready to endow them with an active spirit of evil initiative.

Non-Comprehension of the Machines

My second special inability and third source of my present humiliations is in the matter of machines.

I have already written of these in an earlier entry¹ and ventilated on paper the petulance which their lack of proper feeling prevents me from visiting upon the machines themselves. My excuse for bringing them up again is the extent of the domination which they exercise over farm life. I am told that male babies are now being born who bring with them into the world an innate and original knowledge of volts and ampères, of aërials and terminals, of accumulators and transformers, just as other and more glorious babies used to be born with a knowledge of harmony, of chess and of mathematics. This innate knowledge of volts, transformers and the rest is, I suppose, the contemporary form assumed by the clouds of glory that babies are said to come into the world trailing behind them. Certain it is that all around me are young men who take easily and as it were by nature to the ways of machines. They speak of these things to one another in language which, comprehensible to them, is totally incomprehensible to me. And as they are not very good at explaining everyday untechnical matters such as the way to get from here to there, or what X said on the telephone, I can only suppose that their love of machines gives them a particular skill in and power of communication to their kind which in other spheres they lack. It is a familiar thought that love lends eloquence to dumb lips. Like other uneducated persons, they take it for granted that everybody shares

¹ See February 10th, 1947, pp. 81, 82.

their interests, knows what they know and understands the technical jargon which is their mode of communication. When I pluck up enough courage to confess my ignorance of what it is that they are talking about, they are, first, incredulous—"Wot, not know that that's an aerial?"—and then contemptuous. When a machine goes wrong which, when I have any contact with it, it invariably does—I have only to enter it and the proudest Rolls Royce which has never known the sacrilegious hand of the wayside repairer, breaks down and has to seek shelter in the nearest garage; I suppose the brutes know I hate them and sulk accordingly, as a way of paying me out—they explain to me in detail what is wrong, expecting me to feel a sympathetic interest in the distempered entrails of the recalcitrant mechanism. When I try to explain to them that (a) I don't understand; (b) I don't want to understand; (c) that my only interest is in results—I want the thing to be made to work again—"mended" is my comprehensive generic term—and (d) that the whole subject is faintly distasteful to me, they look shocked and hurt. It is as if I had spat in a church or said something disrespectful about the Royal Family.

Now, hitherto I have rather prided myself on this aloof detachment of mine from machines, and have thought of those who tended them very much as Wells caused us to think of the Morlocks in *The Time Machine*, that is to say, as necessary chaps who looked after the machines and kept them in a good temper but who in respect of the attributes of humanity were creatures intermediate between the machines they tended and civilised men.

Now on the farm I simply cannot keep this up any longer. At least half of modern farming consists of machine minding, or operating, or repairing—"maintenance" they call this last—so that when a man is not actually working a machine, he is trying to humour it, so that it will work, or talking to other men about it, or grovelling underneath it, or exploring in its entrails, or

“traipésing” about the country finding spare bits for it. Now, while all this is going on, I stand by helpless and silent and because helpless and silent, ignored. Presently I begin to feel myself an object of contempt to the machine-minded men and, such is the force of example especially in isolated country communities where no relieving or fortifying influence penetrates from outside, presently I begin to despise myself.

Too Old to Learn

For—and here is the fourth cause of my humiliation—I am too old and stupid to learn what I would now fain know.

When I was young, I prided myself on my ability to learn and to assimilate. I wasn't, I think, particularly clever; certainly I wasn't originally or independently minded, but I was inherently teachable, and, in particular, I had a first-rate memory. Not only did I take in what I was taught; I retained it. And since at least three-quarters of examinational success depends upon memory, I was a good examinee. Again and again, I came out top and won the prize, simply because of my ability to remember and to reproduce clearly and faithfully what I had been taught. And more particularly did I win prizes in subjects which put a premium on just this capacity for remembering, in grammar, for example, because I could remember the declensions and the irregular verbs; in history, because I could remember dates and battles; or in literature, because I could remember reams of poetry and keep plenty of apt quotations at my fingers' ends, even in the earlier stages of mathematics, because I could remember the multiplication table—but not in the later, when not even my ability to remember formulae could compensate for my lack of mathematical capacity.

As I grew older and began to teach rather than to learn, this faculty of remembering fell into desuetude from lack of occasions for its exercise. But it enabled me

to come out top in the sort of paper games that one plays at week-end and Christmas parties, because I could remember more battles beginning with A, admirals with B, doctors with C, forms of unnatural vice with D, Chinese dynasties with X, and so on than other people and always evoked surprised admiration by my ability to remember telephone numbers. (I suppose that a good deal of my early Brains Trust success was due to the fact that I could remember quotations and aphorisms and, remembering, too, that originality is for the most part only skill in concealing origins, would reproduce them adjusted and amended as my own.)

And now that as a farmer I have to learn all manner of new things and have need once more of my remembering faculty, I find to my consternation that it has gone. I can't remember the names of birds, flowers, fertilisers, seeds, weeds, grasses, implements and the parts of implements and, of course, I can't remember anything that I am told about machines. I can't remember the processes involved in making cider or sealing barrels, or sowing and bringing to fruition mushroom beds and even if I could remember the processes involved in cider making or barrel filling or onion nurturing, I can't remember the order in which they occur. Thus, though I have been told over and over again, I don't remember what fields are planted with what crops, why such and such a field is lying fallow, what ricks are to be sold, where we get the best prices for our soft fruit, or who has purchased a particular crop of swedes.

I am particularly bad at learning things pertaining to the garden. I can't remember when marrows should be put in, how onions propagate themselves, when to prune roses or to dig borders. I have been told these things many times, yet I have to be told them many times more. Some few things that I picked up in boyhood, for example, when strawberries ripen, how to make a bonfire, where to look for a wren's nest and how to recognise those nests that are made by cocks I retain,

but these pieces of knowledge that have come down to me from remote boyhood are capricious and arbitrary. They are also rigid and incapable of being varied or adapted to meet circumstances. None of this, of course, would matter if it were not for the fact that I *want* to garden and that a strong inherited instinct makes me itch to take part in the work of the farm. I like scything and digging, piling swedes on carts, harvesting crops, and hand sowing seed and I like to share in the others' work. Thus it comes about that I am exasperated by my inability to remember and humiliated by my ineptitude in the performance of common farming processes and above all am I humiliated, as I have said, by my incompetence in the matter of machines and incompetence in the use of my hands.

All my life I have been accustomed to doing pretty well the things that I do habitually, so that I like to be seen doing them, like, in fact, showing off; but here I do the things that I have to do so badly and so much worse than other people do them that I have to try and do them privily when nobody is looking, for fear that I should be seen doing the wrong thing or doing the right thing in the wrong way. Not for years have I attempted to knock a nail in when anybody was present, knowing that it would go awry. Since I came to the farm the number of these operations that I must do in private has greatly increased. Thus, I must retire behind a hedge to undo a knot, or open a crate and take care to see that everybody is out of the stable before I tackle the job of putting a halter on a horse.

To sum up my sources of humiliation, there are, first, the things that I have never been able to do properly and never will; they arise mainly in connection with the use of the hands and the use of machines. Secondly, there is the fact that I have reached an age at which I am (*a*) unable to remember what I am told, so that I am told things again and again and forget them, and (*b*) unable to learn new things or adapt myself to

new situations. I watch other people faced with a problem, how for example, to drain the swimming pool, or how to fill it when it is drained. They adapt themselves to the situation more quickly than I can, find out what has to be done and apparently know how to do it when I am still at a loss, while, if we are all at a loss and have to summon an expert to tell us what we can't find out for ourselves and the staff is called together and the class lined up for teacher's instruction, I find that the others understand and remember what teacher tells them while I am left uncomprehending. I used to be the clever boy of the class; now, I am the dunce. Hence, my humiliations are not so much those of a stupid man as those of a man who has always been clever and must now humble himself to consent to be stupid.

They are also—though these I mind less since, after all, they are only just—those of a man who sees himself subside once a week from the comparatively well-known philosopher and publicist whose company is sought and whose words are listened to into the incompetent old dodderer who is ignorant, but who cannot or will not learn, and who, not to put too fine a point on it, has come to be regarded as rather a nuisance about the place, a nuisance who has to be tolerated and even humoured since the place is, after all, his.

None of this, I repeat, would worry me very much were it not for my absurd itch to take part in farm operations. I get pleasure, as I have said, from pitching hay, scything grass, digging in the ground, even from cutting down nettles, and I get real pleasure from working with other people—a by-product this, I suppose, of the circumstance that my normal work, being reading and writing, is and always has been done alone. Now, both these instincts, the instinct for working on the land and the instinct for belonging as a co-operating unit to some body, gang or team are satisfied by working however briefly and badly with the men. All of which means, of course, that I am continually at war with myself,

part of me wanting to make contact with the others and take a hand in their work and another part protesting against the humiliations to which my manifest incompetence exposes me.

Frustrations and Disquietudes

All this, as I said at the beginning, came to a head this morning when I took a lesson in tractor driving. What with the noise, the stench and the lurchings of the machine—a caterpillar tractor—what with my sweating anxiety not to make a fool of myself, I fell into every kind of ignominy, failed to take the engine out of gear, failed to turn correctly, failed to drive straight, forgot to take up the blades of the plough at the turn, forgot to let them down again for the new furrow, drove the plough up the wrong side of an unploughed strip and so on. I suppose that one day these humiliations will cease and I shall come to terms with myself to the extent of not making myself try to do the things that I manifestly can't do, one of which, I am afraid, will be tractor driving. Meanwhile, the farm remains a major source of uneasiness and frustration in which on analysis I think I can detect three separate elements.

First, there is the conflict within myself which I have just described. I am anxious to play my part and to work with the rest, and constantly humiliated by my inability to do so. I have taken to farming too late in life; I am fat and feeble and stiff by reason of rich living and quickly tire. I work for an hour or so with the men and then want to rest or to stop altogether. But some of the men are older than I and I am ashamed not to go on as they do. Hence, I overtire myself and reduce myself to a condition of brutish insensitiveness in the evenings.

Secondly, there is the uneasiness over finance. When I planned the farm expenditure in June, 1946, prices stood, let us say, at £.x. When in November I took the farm and began to buy, prices were already standing at

£ $x + \frac{1}{4}$ to $\frac{1}{3}$; now, in May 1947, prices are £ $x + \frac{1}{3}$ to $\frac{1}{2}$, all of which means that the things that I have had to buy, livestock, dead stock, fertilisers, seeds, horses, horse furniture, above all, machines are all from one-third to one-half as much again as I bargained for; in short, I have been carried upwards on the ascending curve of an inflationary spiral. Meanwhile, though the prices of farm produce have gone up, their rise has not been commensurate with the rise in the price of farm requisites. Hence, all my hard-earned and carefully invested capital has dribbled away and I have begun to borrow. No harm I suppose, in that; in fact, everybody tells me that it is the right thing to do, especially as the inflation is likely to continue. But I come of peasant ancestry and am prudent to the point of parsimony in money matters and all my peasant instincts are alarmed by borrowing.

Another source of financial uneasiness is the lack of money control. Hitherto, I have always controlled my expenditure. I have spent no more than I could afford and save for occasional journeys abroad, when I did not know the ropes, spent no more than I intended. Now, farming is, for me, in this respect like going abroad with the difference that the journey continues indefinitely. I never know how much will need to be bought; I never know what it is going to cost and, though I trust my manager, I can never tell from month to month what expenditure will be necessary to keep the farm going. Conversely, I don't know even within the widest limits, what will be returned to me in the matter of payment for produce sold, or *when* it will be returned to me. No doubt, all this is only to be expected. To start a farm is difficult enough at any time; it is particularly difficult for one who is doing it for the first time late in life without experience, and it is more difficult still when the currency is being inflated.

Thirdly, there is the obligation which the farm imposes upon me of evolving a new technique of living, an obligation which up till now I am very far from

discharging. Hitherto my technique of right living has involved continuous visits to the country. A week in which I did not spend a couple of days out of London was for me a week of such weariness that by the end of it I could hardly bear myself. But the visit to the country has not normally lasted for more than a couple of days and in the evenings I have always been able to play a game of chess or bridge. These weekly visits did three things for me. First, they enabled me to make contact with nature. I suppose that the need for country sights and sounds, the craving for occasional solitude in nature is instinctive in all of us. With me this instinctive need, which in most of us is unconscious, had become conscious. To go to the country was, in other words, a specific need, a recurrent craving. My chief method of satisfying it has hitherto been to walk. I loved to walk at loose and at large through the English countryside, down a lane, over a stile, across a field into a farmyard, and so down a farm track through another field into a copse, and I would do these walks at all seasons of the year.

Secondly, they gave me the chance of meditation in solitude. I say "meditation," but in fact it was rarely that I meditated; indeed, in any technical sense of the word I don't know how to do it. For most of the time on these walks my mind was a complete blank; like the nature that surrounded me, I vegetated. Occasionally—very occasionally—I introduced myself to myself, but having found as always that I didn't much enjoy the acquaintance, I contrived to break it off as quickly as possible by taking out a compass and poring over a map, calculating distances and planning routes. In spite or, perhaps, because of this sedulous self-avoidance, I nevertheless came away from these solitary walks mentally and spiritually refreshed.

But always I had books, a book to read in and a book to write in, and when I tired of walking, I would sit down to do one or the other. Indeed, all over Surrey and Sussex there are woods which stand out now in my

memory—indeed, there are particular trees in woods under which I have sat and read and written, trees to which I have made deliberate pilgrimage, trees under which, now that I have this energy and time-draining farm on my hands, I fear I shall sit no more. So the third requirement which the country helped to satisfy, was the requirement of reading and writing. If I had a difficult piece of work to do, some hard passage of philosophy to read or a book to plan, the country was the place to do it in. I have found by experience that the execution of the plan is better postponed until I am back in London. If I try to write in the country, I find that my wits lose their nimbleness and my sentences their kick. The country is congenial to the necessary preparatory work, the taking of notes, the gathering of material, the planning of the form in which to arrange it, but the actual writing, especially if it wants the polish on it required for an article, is better left for the return to town.

Intercourse with Nature, then, both meditative and vegetative, musing out of doors and reading, note-taking and planning, were the experiences and activities for which I have for years been in the habit of resorting to the country. I would take a midday train from town, go for a walk by myself and put up for the night at a farmhouse. I knew a number of such houses in south-west Surrey and west Sussex where I could usually feel assured of a welcome, supper, company, a game of chess, bed and breakfast. The next morning I would spend writing, then another walk, a ride or tennis and so back to London. Such days, especially if they happened in autumn or spring, are among the 'pleasantest I have known. Now that I have a farm, all these good things have lapsed. As to walking, pure walking for walking's sake, nobody on a farm has ever been known to do such a thing and, in fact, I hardly ever leave the confines of the farm. As for the meditating, the joys of the quietly rambling mind wandering here and there at its pleasure,

or the vegetating, the experience of the empty, stationary mind, doing nothing at all—these are things of the past. The moment I arrive at the farm, I am immersed in a set of interests, entangled in a net of affairs, beset by an array of problems such as, for example, going to see the horses, riding them, taking the horses to be shod, trying to fill the bathing pool, trying to find out why it won't fill and installing machinery to fill it, making plans for a garden extension, considering the possibility of rigging up a summer house, scything, bill-hooking, weeding, digging, planting, going out with a gun to shoot rabbits or non-existent pheasants, going to meet somebody at the station or seeing them off, doing accounts, writing cheques, wondering, as stated above, how to make both ends meet, filling up forms, making cider, sealing up barrels, planning farming policy, entering into negotiations about rented lands, looking at orchards, spraying them and wondering why they don't produce more fruit, corresponding with municipal bodies, Government Departments and County Agricultural Committees, seeing their representatives, trying to get possession of farm cottages, seeing architects and builders and wondering how best to lay out the money one is allowed to spend, watching the cows milked and calling in the vet when they fall sick, calling on and being called on by neighbours—all these, of course, being apart from and in addition to the actual operations of farming, tractor-driving, hoeing, singling, hay-making, mangel-carting, dung-carting, ploughing, drilling, sowing and harrowing, cutting, harvesting, in all of which I try on occasion to take an intermittent and, as I have explained, an ignominiously inefficient hand.

What, meanwhile, has happened to the writing and the reading? They have been tucked away into odd half-hours, snatched from the morning or evening occupations of the farm when I am too tired or too stupid—for these physical activities dull the mind and brutalise the spirit—or my head is too full of the matters I have

mentioned, to be able to extend to the work I am trying to do the concentrated attention it requires. Worried about money, worried about the farm, worried about my own inefficiency, I neither do the old work which I am accustomed and fitted to do, the work of reading and writing and thinking, nor the new work to which I have so rashly committed myself, the work of trying to take part in the life of a farm.

When I go back to town, things are no better. I have to crowd into three or four days a week the work and the play that I used to spread over five or six. I do everything in a rush and do everything, therefore, less well than I can. I have no time to browse or meditate. I must drive my mind every day and all day and cannot rest; I am too busy thinking to stop and think. . . . I am making the worst of two worlds.

I have no heart to continue these laments nor, indeed, is it edifying for the reader to see me further humiliated, so I merely note, as I did at the beginning, that I have still to evolve the right technique for this new double life.

These things and others like unto them, impolite and ill-advised things, things which, for example, dwelt upon our general irritability and shortness of temper, upon the discourtesy of the people whom the foreign visitors would meet, the horrible hotels in which they would have to stay, the indifferent and casual waitresses by whom they would be served, the frozen-eyed girls behind counters and reception desks by whom they would be snapped at, not to speak of our ill-cooked and beastly food—these things, I say, my impulse prompted me to write a reply.

What, however, I did do was to write back a polite letter containing a conventional eulogy of the beauties of the Lake District and Snowdonia, a recommendation to visit villages in the Cotswolds and the small towns of Suffolk, Clare, Lavenham and the like, and a suggestion that visitors should seek out some unspoilt stretch of wild coast line if—the one touch of reality I permitted myself—they could find it.

Time-serving hypocrisy? Partly, no doubt; I was flattered by being included among “celebrated and representative” persons and wanted as a public figure to indulge myself in the luxury of playing for once the part expected of me. Why shouldn’t I cause myself for once to be approved of by persons of eminence and authority, instead of always putting their backs up?

But to do myself justice this was not the only, still less the sufficient motive. More to the point, was the reflection that, if I had said what I thought, *Coming Events* would not print it. For why, after all, should an official organisation let foreigners know disagreeable truths about the way the English treat the beauty they have inherited, let alone the discourtesy with which their women greet the foreigner who visits them?

What is more, I knew that I could not express my real views in any journal or periodical which attracted a reasonably large circulation. Not one would have printed it. Even if they admitted the truth of what I said and were sympathetic to the sentiments I expressed,

May 30th, 1947

ON RECOMMENDING ENGLAND TO FOREIGNERS

THERE ARRIVED THIS MORNING a copy of *Coming Events in the British Isles*, a journal issued by the British Travel Association, a semi-official body under government patronage.

The journal's circulation is largely overseas and it is designed to attract overseas visitors to this country by advertising places of interest and events of importance and generally hymning its praises. Among events celebrated as attractions it draws attention to the forthcoming speedboat trials by a vessel fitted with jet engines upon "lovely Coniston Water," specially chosen for the purpose because it is quiet, sheltered and beautiful. Photographs are appended.

Coming Events is accompanied by a letter addressed to a number of "celebrated and representative" people asking us what *we* would recommend "as appealing most deeply to *yourself* if *you* were a visitor from a foreign country."

Taking the word "appealing" to mean "significant," "instructive" or "interesting," and not merely "pleasure giving" or "benefit conferring," what I should have done, what, indeed my immediate impulse prompted me to do, was to call upon prospective overseas visitors "to admire the skill with which we had contrived to make the most of our natural resources by turning our moors and mountains into bombing targets, artillery ranges and tank practice areas, appropriating the quiet loveliness of Coniston Lake for an exhibition of our ability to make louder noises and to alter the position of bits of metal on water more rapidly than they have ever been altered before, and putting St. Paul's in its place with a properly sited generating station south of the River Thames."

they would insist that one mustn't foul one's own nest—not in front of the foreigner; and, indeed, it is true that I, too, speak well of England when I go abroad. The parish magazine of some little society of non-conforming oddities like myself would, no doubt, have published willingly enough, but then who would have read what I had to say except the oddities? So why not, I thought, put it into my diary just as I would have liked to put it into my letter, in order that anybody who does me the honour of reading the diary, may know that people like myself who are supposed to have staked out a claim on the public ear are yet very far from being able to put into it what they think. If I had proposed to say these things over the B.B.C., it would have had a fit. . . .

June 1st, 1947

HEAT, CONVENTION AND THE BODY

IT IS ONLY NINE and a half months since I was recording in this diary my conviction that we no longer live in a temperate climate. Since then we have endured the great cold. I now repeat the remark, prompted thereto by the great heat.

Last night at midnight the temperature was over eighty degrees Fahrenheit. On each of the last four days it has risen to eighty-five degrees; to-day it is ninety-two degrees, and there is no sign of a change; yet this is only the 1st June. The effect of the late winter with its gross cold succeeded by the early summer and its gross heat has been to squeeze out the spring. For about a fortnight at the beginning of May there was spring proper, with primroses, daffodils, violets, prunus and apple blossom and all the usual features in bloom together. But the seasons are telescoped and lilac time, rhododendron time, chestnut time, may time and hay time are now with us simultaneously.

My recipe for dealing with this torrid heat is frequent bathing. This morning I came back early to London from the farm, complete with bathing dress and towel, and went to the Hampstead bathing pool before going home. In the morning the pool is reserved for the male sex from seven to ten and there is no charge. In spite of the fact that only men are present and men, presumably, know what men's bodies look like, bathing suits or slips are compulsory. When I reached the swimming pool I found to my consternation that I was without my bathing suit. I had dropped it somewhere on the way from the tube station. Hot and bothered, I retraced my steps, retraced them all the way to the tube station but I could not find the thing. Somebody, it was obvious, had

picked it up. As I have no coupons, I can't buy another, not at any rate to-day, apart from the fact that I am told that bathing dresses for persons of my girth are hard to come by. So not only have I been done out of my bathe this morning but I shall be done out of it again this afternoon, with only heat of body, irritation of mind and expense of spirit in a waste of sweat to show for my deprivation.

By whom or what have I been done out of the pleasures of immersing my body in cold water? Answer, presumably, by convention, the convention that the body is wicked and ought therefore to be covered.

I belong to a generation that waxed indignant over conventions and embarked upon a campaign to deride and flout them. Not without reason; for upon us, growing up in the first decade of the century, was laid the obligation of liquidating Victorianism. We conceived it to be our duty to liberate the world from the conventions by which our parents had been oppressed. In so doing, we were, we were assured, instruments of progress. More particularly, we sought to loosen the Victorian conventions about sex and conventions about dress. Now, I have ceased to care what conventions people observe, provided they don't inconvenience me personally. But this bathing-suit convention does inconvenience me enormously. If I am walking and want to bathe, I have to carry a bathing suit in my rucksack. When it is wet, this is apt to soak everything in the rucksack. (I have known MS. rendered illegible and food uneatable by the percolations from an imperfectly dried bathing suit. Again and again agreeably bound books have been damaged beyond recovery.)

"Why not dry the suit first?"

"That would be a nuisance and, anyway, it would take time."

If I am walking and have no bathing suit and come to the seaside, then I cannot enter the sea unless I am willing first to join a long queue of persons standing in hot

discomfort on a noisy and shadeless beach, waiting for bathing suits to be doled out to them. It frequently happens that on very hot days there are not enough suits, or not enough tents or huts to go round, and one has to wait for people to come out of the water in which they are bathing or off the beach on which they are sunbathing. Sometimes hours elapse before they are willing to surrender their suits. If, as happened this morning, I have a suit, but drop it on my way to the bathing place, then I cannot bathe at all.

Now who, I want to know, or what gains from this convention? I suppose that I shall be told that it is imposed in the interests of decency. I have noticed that the degree of a person's decency depends upon the number of things which he contrives to hold to be indecent. . . .

And why, pray, should the body be held to be wicked at all? Who says that it is wicked? And what part of it is wicked? It is obvious that in my own lifetime the allegedly wicked part has varied enormously, especially in the case of women's bodies. When I was young, women's legs were wicked but most of their breasts could be bared with impunity, particularly if they belonged to the dining-out class. Now legs are shameless, but breasts are concealed.

In general, however, a far smaller area of the body, and particularly of women's bodies, is now held to be wicked than was the case when I was growing up. In particular, the navel, which was then always concealed and rarely mentioned, is now everywhere to be seen at bathing pools, coyly ensconced in its little crater of flesh.

Who, I wonder, or what determines whether a particular area of the body is or is not wicked at any particular moment? When decency zones are increasing in area, who or what determines the rate and direction of increase? I don't know. There seem to be no rules in this matter. Hence, I applaud the decision of an American society leader to have her baby daughter

vaccinated on the sole of one of her feet, so that no future vagaries of fashion, however odd, could possibly reveal any disfigurement.

Reverting, however, to the question of bathing suits, it occurs to me that it may be in the interests of what is called "morality" that these are made compulsory. If morality means, as I take it in this connection it does, the not feeling desire for the body of a member of the opposite sex for which one's desire has *not* been previously sanctioned by matrimony, or if one does feel it, acting as if one does not, then the psychological error involved is surely profound. Anybody who has been to a nudist camp knows perfectly well that the effect of baring the whole of the body is not to increase but to diminish desire, to diminish it so gravely, that if the eyes of human beings were permitted permanently to range at all times over the whole of the bodies of the other sex, our loves would become seasonal like those of the animals.

No, it is the artfully designed concealment of small and carefully chosen areas which excites desire, which is, perhaps, why bathing dresses are insisted upon.

Well and good! I have no objection. But why insist on them for me, who wish to excite desire in nobody and who, indeed, by no arrangement of coverings, however cunningly designed, could now possibly do so? From my point of view—and here I come back to where I began—the restriction is an unmitigated nuisance; an unmitigated nuisance, too, at the farm where we have a bathing pool and where I can visualise awkward situations arising. For if some cover their bodies and others do not, both parties are apt to feel uncomfortable. If *all* are to cover their bodies, then the objections to bathing suits which I have already detailed come into force and it is a little hard, I hold, that I should be oppressed by them on my own farm. On the other hand, if bathing suits are not worn by some, then pleasant and agreeable people who want to use the pool will be either prevented from using it or embarrassed, if they do use it, by the

spectacle of the naked bodies of bathing men. The trouble is that there are always *some* conventions and the present generation which has got rid of so many still clings obstinately, especially the female part of it, to the convention about the covering of certain parts of the body.

The glimpse of the moors—it was no more than a glimpse—brought back memories of a period in my life when I seemed continuously to be visiting this moorland country. It was here, indeed, that I first learned to walk with proper seriousness. I went first to these parts in 1919—or was it 1920?—to join a small unofficial Fabian Summer School which was established in a hotel at Ravenscar. G. D. H. Cole, I remember, was there and lectured about the then unheard of possibility of a Labour Government. The first afternoon three of us, an old gentleman, the founder and organiser of the School, his secretary and I went for a walk. Where should we go? “The cliffs running along to Robin Hood’s bay are very fine,” said the old gentleman, “carrying great views over the sea.” But I, full of energy and contrariness, said that I wanted to go inland on to the moors. So the old gentleman stuck to the cliffs and I went on to the moors—the secretary, by the way, went with me and the old gentleman never forgave us. That was the beginning. Mountains I had known, but I had never been on moorland before and this great stretch of country—I must have seen it first in August when the heather was gloriously out—went first to my head, then to my heart and so to my feet. For this is the best country I know for walking. These east Yorkshire moors are as wide and as challenging as Dartmoor and one is filled with a surge of energy and a sense of power unknown in Devonshire, which impels one to accept the challenge. East coast air always invigorates me, giving me the energy that I lack in the west and I would walk what now seem to me to have been prodigious distances, covering in the course of a fortnight most of the ground that lies between Lilla Cross in the west, the River Derwent in the south and the coast on the east.

This tract of country had not in those days been much visited and Yorkshire farmhouse teas survived uncorrupted in their primitive glory. We would go out about twelve, after the morning lecture, taking a

June 8th, 1947

WALKING IN EAST YORKSHIRE

LECTURED YESTERDAY at the University College in Hull. I stayed with the Principal who gave us a good dinner and good company. In my experience, University Common Rooms provide the best company in the world. This I attribute to three causes; first, the presence of highly educated people who, unlike most professional men, have had time to keep abreast of their subject, who are not overworked and who are, in general, sufficiently masters of ideas to afford to be at play with them. While the heads of most doctors, lawyers, civil servants and parsons are so bowed down by the burden of their daily duties that they have lost sight of the general knowledge they once possessed and abandoned the habit of serious reading, dons are forced by the obligations of lecturing and teaching to keep their reading up-to-date and to retain some hold of the things of the mind.

Secondly, here is a society in the sense that all the members of it are known to one another and are constantly meeting one another; hence, there is no preliminary breaking of conversational ice.

Thirdly, the absence of women which permits general conversation.

To-day I was to lecture to the Scarborough Women's Club. I had the luck to meet at the dinner an H.M.I., who was driving from Hull to Scarborough and wanted a day on the moors. We left early, drove north, leaving Scarborough on our right, parked the car at Hackness and started up Whisper Dale. This is a lovely dale with steep sides, tree-crowned, sloping down to the stream at the bottom and at the end a steep little climb out on to Silpho Moor. After a mile or so of walking on the open moor, we found time running short and had to turn back for a forced march—at times it was a run—down the Dale and so into the car for the drive to Scarborough.

sandwich lunch which we ate on the moors, bathe in a moorland stream, or it might be in the Derwent, and then walk to a farmhouse, say in Harwood Dale, for tea. What spreads they were! The table would be covered with two or three kinds of bread, a couple of hams, a large flat open cheese-cake and some kind of open fruit tart—nothing taken out of box or tin, no single cake bought in a shop.

That summer was the first of a number of East Yorkshire visits. There were two successive Summer Schools at Cober Hill, Cloughton, a few miles south of Ravenscar, just within walking distance of Scarborough, whence I explored for the first time those southward running dales, North Side and Langdale and Whisper Dale and High Dale that stretch their green fingers into the moor.

I had by this time established myself as an authority on the moors and was the accepted leader of organised walks. I would take parties over hill and dale, through bramble and barbed wire, with never more than half a mile at a time on the road, usually somewhere near the Falcon Inn, so that by the end of the walk no stocking was untorn, no boot unmuddied, no lady's shoe, if such a thing had made its appearance in the party, intact. The longest of these walks I can still remember in detail. We took the train to Whitby, changed into the train that runs up the Goathland Valley, got out at Grosmont and walked right across the moor, ending up at Cloughton after doing nearly thirty miles. I remember making first by compass for Lilla Cross in the middle of the moor, whence was a wonderful view eastward to the coast and then going straight for Cloughton across a series of deep ravines.

Later I attended several summers running a W.E.A. Summer School at Saltburn. I used to seize every opportunity of escaping from the atmosphere of the seaside place and getting out on to the moors. A fellow tutor who shared my tastes and I would take bus or

train to Guisborough and set out southwards from there, doing all the country that lies round Battersby Junction. I don't remember this northern area of the moors so well—it did not come home to me with the same impact of novelty and freshness—but I do remember the end of this phase which was a drive down the road which runs from Saltburn to Whitby towards the end of August 1924, when the whole landscape was moorland heather, stretching as far as the eye could reach, with a blood-red sunset over the sea of purple; it was one of those moments which one remembers all one's life. . . .

It was at the end of one of these moorland walks that I took train to and was duly shocked by Middlesbrough—for which I subsequently became a Parliamentary candidate. During my melancholy visits to this place in the *rôle* of candidate I used to make continual escapes from town and potential constituents for walks on to the Cleveland Hills and the moors behind—not, alas, long ones, for by this time I was well on in middle age and beginning to fatten, but far enough to take me for the first time to the top of Rosebery Topping and so down to Great Ayton, a village with the usual lovely core dating from a more gracious age, surrounded by the inevitable scurf of hideous unplanned cottages, the typical emanations of our own. But long before this political period I had stayed with the W.E.A. tutor at his cottage at Malton, whence we attacked the moors from the south, penetrating northward as far as Appleton-le-Moor and visiting for the first time those lovely villages, Lastingham and Hutton-le-Hole, which fringe its southern edges. During a fortnight which I spent with him in the summer of 1925 I must have walked over most of Bilsdale. Coming back in the evening, we cooked our own suppers, sang unaccompanied duets and played Mozart on the gramophone.

These were some of the memories that came thronging into my mind as I climbed puffing and sweating at the heels of the Inspector out of the narrowing slip of

Whisper Dale on to the open moor. I thought regretfully how much more I used to enjoy walking than I now do. Perhaps, I only keep it up as I do, insisting, whenever I go to stay with people on lecture tours, on the condition that I be allowed to walk by myself next day, because of a sentimental clinging to my youth and the past. For in truth I don't enjoy the physical act of walking so much as I used to do; in fact, I enjoy it very little. I remind myself that when my pleasure in the physical act was greatest, my pleasure in nature was smallest; was, indeed, so small that as I rushed through the countryside I thought only of gamekeepers, the route and the map and reached the age of forty-five knowing very little of the habits of beasts and birds and the names of only a few wild flowers. Now that I move slowly, I enjoy looking at things more. Perhaps it is not until I am completely stationary that I shall derive from natural surroundings, the full measure, the benison that they have to bestow. After all, Epicurus sat under a fig tree and Diogenes in a tub. I haven't quite got to that stage yet, but I alter the position of my body in space less frequently than I did, and can say truthfully with Henry James that the older I grow, the more I enjoy the pleasures of not travelling.

On this occasion, after running three miles to the car and arriving late, dishevelled and sweaty from the moors at one of the grandest hotels in Scarborough, I gave one of the best lectures that it has ever been my pleasure to deliver, or an audience's privilege to hear. "Now you couldn't," I told myself, trying to comfort myself for my lost powers as a walker, "You couldn't *talk* like that when you were young!"

After it was over a lady came up to me and said, "Dr. Joad, that was one of the most wonderful lectures I have ever heard. It is going to change my life."

"Dear lady," I said, "do pray let me hear you say that again." It stopped her. I learnt this counter attack, by the way, from Somerset Maugham.

July 27th, 1947

ON HAVING BEEN ONCE THE COMPLETE SUMMER SCHOOL
MAN. FABIANS AT BARROW HOUSE. SUMMER SCHOOLS AT
LARGE

TO THE FABIAN SUMMER SCHOOL at Dartington Hall—my sixth visit in the last seven years. As always, a host of memories! I once earned the description of the complete Summer School man which was, I think, intended to convey the fact that I put more into Summer Schools, got more out of them, enjoyed myself more thoroughly and in a greater variety of ways and touched the life of the School at a greater number of points than anybody else. And, indeed, I have had a long Summer School career. It began at the end of August 1914 when, having taken Greats and followed them up with the Civil Service examination, I went for a holiday to my first Fabian Summer School at Keswick.

Fabians at Barrow House

The experience made a tremendous impact upon my undergraduate consciousness. The reasons, I think, were these: (a) I had never seen writers at close quarters in the flesh before. (b) I had never before been at large in a community of comparatively intellectual or, perhaps I should say, intellectually interested persons, most of whom were my intellectual inferiors. Either I had been, as in my own home and holiday environments with those who despised or ignored the life of the mind, or, as at Balliol where the intellect was honoured, with my intellectual equals or superiors. (c) I had never before been in a company which was so unversed in the things of the body that I could pass relatively as an athlete, winning the tennis tournament, making runs in the cricket match and—though this is to anticipate, for I did not begin to walk seriously until later Summer Schools—taking part in and presently leading long walks. (d) I had never before been in a community where the

women (i) made much of the men; (ii) did not mind my being badly dressed; (iii) had apparently less severe views on sexual conduct than I had myself—I fell in love with one of them and subsequently married her. (e) Never before had I known the discussion of ideas taken for granted as a fit subject for ordinary conversation. I was an intellectual young man who for nearly ten years had been steadily stuffed for examinations. As a result, I was full of a massive, undigested content of philosophy and history and literature of which I had been only imperfectly able to relieve myself by unloading it on to my examination papers, and here was a society where people were prepared to discuss all or any of these topics with a fluency and familiarity which adequately concealed their superficiality from the comparative innocence of my intellectual vision. These discussions, easy, frequent and entertaining enabled me to relieve myself of a great weight of surplus informational and ideological material. (f) Never before had I been continuously in the company of *politically* sympathetic persons. Like many politically conscious young men of my generation, I had easily become a Fabian Socialist. This was the first gay springtime of Fabian Socialism; the mists of past illusions were dispelled and the future lay before us bathed in the sunshine of unlimited possibility. Everything seemed worth attempting; no obstacles seemed too great for our overcoming. In effect, we believed ourselves to be in the van of a procession marching under the standards of Shaw, Webb and Wells—the last admittedly a little out of step—to the promised land of Fabian Socialism which lay just round the corner. (g) What added point and poignancy to the situation—albeit, we succeeded in almost completely ignoring it—was the fact that the War of 1914–18 had just broken out. A civilisation had come to an end and a new era had begun, an era which for all mankind, except the working classes, that is to say, for practically all the mankind that I knew, was by comparison with what we had

known, notably inferior. While we were enjoying ourselves at the Summer School, the Germans marched through Belgium, the first battle of the Marne was fought and the Russian steam-roller broke down. The only cognisance that we took of these events was to institute a competition for the best set of comic verses on the Kaiser and the Crown Prince. For my part, I did not hear of them until weeks afterwards. I read, wrote, discussed, argued, went up mountains, danced, fell in love, and rescued the loved girl—or so I like to think—from drowning in Derwentwater lake. I had never had such a time before and I don't think I have ever had such a time since.

Summer Schools at Large

Barrow House in the summer of 1914 has come to stand in my mind as the symbol of all the Summer Schools that I subsequently visited; for all of them ran, for me, much the same course. At all, I had the same sensation of a raising of the level and a quickening of the pulse of life that I had first experienced at Barrow House. The Fabians in those early years were puritanical. Puritanism, indeed, pervaded the Socialist movement of thirty years ago. We lived plain and thought hard; drinking was practically unknown, and though "flirting," whatever that may be—the connotation of the word was always obscure and is now obsolete—was permitted, love-making proper was regarded with grave reprobation. Couples might go for walks in the grounds at dusk, but there was a devil of a row if they stayed out all night! They would appear rather shamefacedly, since after all they *had* cut the evening lecture, for the communal tea-drinking by the assembled School at ten o'clock. My guess is—and I hazard it in spite of the incredulity with which it will be received to-day—that few, if any, at those early Summer Schools went illegitimately to bed with anybody. For my part, I was constantly in trouble on this score and acquired a bad name. In part it was deserved. I accepted with all the

seriousness of my literal mind the ideas of Shaw and Wells, which at that time pervaded the intellectual air we breathed. The Victorian conventions were breaking down; there was a good deal of vague talk of "free love"—though the "goings on" of the 'twenties were not yet, certainly not among the Fabians—and my "affairs"—I was in those days extremely sensitive to the attractions of pretty girls and had still to learn the arts of concealment; in fact, I tended to make a merit of declining to learn them—landed me in more or less perpetual hot water, so much so, that I was after a time forbidden to attend the School. I retaliated by getting myself elected as Summer School representative by a sky-larking body of young persons called the Fabian Nursery, and the pretty problem then arose as to whether a man who was a properly elected representative on the governing body of an organisation could be legitimately debarred from attending its functions. . . .

But, to the best of my recollection, it was only in part that it was deserved. Nothing exceeds the licence taken by the imaginations of very rigid persons and misdemeanours were imputed to me of which I was innocent. For example, in 1919 or 1920 I attended a Fabian Summer School at Penlea on the south Devon coast, near Dartmouth. It was fine August weather, the nights were hot and several of us made a practice of sleeping out of doors. We would take our mattresses vaingloriously to the edge of the cliff and a very uncomfortable night we used to have of it. Like most townspeople, I had never acquired the art of sleeping out and, in fact, we slept very little; the ground was hard, the night was full of unaccustomed sounds and by dawn one was covered with the moisture of a heavy dew. Certainly we never made love—there were too many of us, we were too uncomfortable, and the nights were hardly ever hot enough. Nevertheless, while these uncomfortable nights were dragging their dreary lengths away, unspeakable "goings on" were imputed to us.

Or, I can remember going with a party for an all day walk on Dartmoor; there was a mist and I with two girls got separated from the others. We lost our way, missed the last train and, having no money for hotels, spent the night dead tired under a hayrick; early in the morning, breakfastless, we did a forced march of twenty odd miles back to Penlea. We were received with the blackest looks—in fact, it was this incident which precipitated the ban on my attendance at future Fabian Schools—albeit there were *two* girls, albeit one was forty if she was a day, while the other I remember to have been of an unattractiveness so quite out of the common, that anybody who knew even remotely what was what would have known that this was an unplanned and deplored incident which brought no pleasure—least of all, sexual pleasure—to anybody. Having lost the flock, we were panic stricken and our only thought was how to return to it as soon as possible.

Expelled from later Fabian Summer Schools, I passed on to Schools organised by the Independent Labour Party, then in the hey-day of its political influence. Later I acted as tutor at a series of W.E.A. Schools, where one spent the morning lecturing and taking classes. There is, or rather there was, some peculiar combination of faculties or it may be merely some quirk of temperament, which enabled me to shine in these places. First, I was a good lecturer and talker; I was intellectually alive and took a prominent part in the discussions which followed the lectures. In particular, I had the power of stimulating and exciting young men. Moreover, I was quick at making surface contacts, knew everybody and was the centre of talk at meals. I liked organising; I made the announcements and arranged the games since, unlike most of my kind, I had a certain facility at games. In a gathering of middle class people this would have been in no sense outstanding. But those attending Summer Schools were mainly working and lower middle class folk, whose education and

upbringing had denied them the opportunity of playing games. The physique of most working class people is frail or stunted, their limbs are distorted by the conditions under which they have had to work and they have no charm or grace of the body; they cannot ride horses; they cannot swim; they cannot skate; they cannot make a fire out of doors; they cannot milk a cow and they do not know how to hit a ball. What a commentary upon the civilisation that produces them! Their tennis, in particular, was shameful and most of them had not touched a cricket bat for years. Thus, it was easy for me to continue to win the tennis tournaments and natural for me to captain the cricket teams. About this time I developed a passion for long-distance walking across country, and particularly for leading walks—or “rambles,” as we called them—across country. A dozen or more of us would set out for a day’s “rambling” under my leadership. I could outrun and outwalk most of them and I used to enjoy showing off my powers. Hence, I would take the most formidable routes I could devise, up mountains, across moors, through woods, over rivers, down cliffs; I did not, in fact, walk at all, I simply made a bee line across country to a particular spot and ran there. I did not mind, in fact, I rather sought out occasions for trespassing and—to my shame I remember it—would go through fields of growing corn or even of standing crops. As I have recorded elsewhere in this diary,¹ I attended a number of Summer Schools on the east Yorkshire coast between Whitby and Scarborough and was an assiduous walker over those wide heather moors that stretch between the coast and the Goathland Valley. This is first-rate country for walking, wild and empty, and I ranged over it in a sort of fury of energy which blows through me with the east coast air. None of the accredited leaders of the School were walkers. Politicians, in particular, seem to be disabled by the wretched conditions of their lives from participation in

¹ See entry for June 8th, 1947.

almost all physical activities. I suppose that if you spend your life in large towns sitting on committees, making speeches at meetings, smoking and drinking beer, wearing blue serge suits and Albert watch chains, your body is more or less bound to become a shapeless, fattened mass by the time you are fifty.

And so it came about that the people I learnt to know on the walks, as one can learn to know people only on walks, were different individuals from those with whom I tended to consort when back at the School. They were younger, shyer, less articulate. My contacts with both Summer School worlds, the world of articulate politicians and intellectuals and the world of comparatively dumb but hearty walkers, enabled me to fill the *rôle* of a centre or focus from which personal relations radiated out to people who at the perimeter never met. I knew more people than anybody else at the School and more different kinds of people. . . .

In the evenings there was dancing at which I pursued young women. These could never be brought to realise that I wanted them only for certain limited purposes—for dancing and love-making in the evening and sitting next to at meals—and did not want to pair off with one of them all day, as an established Summer School couple. They seemed equally unable to understand or to forgive the manifest fact that their day-time company bored me and that I had far too many interests and duties on my hands to have much time to spare for *them*, or rather, for any particular one of them, since operating as I did at a purely superficial level of sexual relationship, I had far too many women on my hands to be able to spare enough time to satisfy any of them. I liked women, I told them, too much to pay them the bad compliment of neglecting all of them for the sake of one. But none of this could the girls at the Summer Schools understand nor, indeed, have their successors understood it since.

Sometimes instead of dancing in the evening, there were

"sing-songs" and at these again I was the leader. I could vamp on the piano and sing out loud with a large, throaty, untrained voice. I knew all the obvious old songs which do their dreary round of Summer Schools year after year—"There is a Tavern," "Polly Wolly Doodle," "Clementine," "John Peel," "Wrap me up in My Tarpaulin Jacket," and so on, knew not just the choruses but the words of all the verses, and I also knew a host of other less familiar songs of the same type. I knew marching songs, pornographic songs and rounds—lots of rounds in which I acquired a certain skill in apportioning the parts and getting groups of shy singers to take them. As for myself, I was a by no means contemptible singer of patter songs of the type of the "Duke of Plaza Toro" or the Grand Inquisitor's song in *The Gondoliers*, so that I could and did take a leading part in the home-made entertainments of the revue type in which on a Friday evening the Summer School week culminated. In effect, then, I was active in an enormous variety of ways, giving lectures, discussing, arguing, playing tennis, playing cricket, leading rambles, leading the singing, giving out notices, planning the entertainments, selecting cricket teams, dancing, making love. Looking back on it I am amazed at my versatility, and on the whole I enjoyed myself to the very top of my capacity. Most of my pleasure was the pleasure of gratified vanity; I liked showing off and these gatherings of not very clever, not very talented and not very educated people who could too easily be made to think that I was wonderful, gave me unlimited opportunities for doing so. In effect, I was only exploiting the advantages conferred upon me by my superior educational opportunities in order to play to the gallery of those who had not been so fortunate. I *did* play, I *was* applauded and, as I have said, I enjoyed myself as much as, perhaps more than, I have ever enjoyed myself since.

July 28th, 1947

IN PRAISE OF DARTINGTON

ALL THIS CAME BACK HOME to me very forcibly yesterday when I arrived at Dartington—so forcibly that I sat up in my room late at night and wrote it down. Dartington is a happy combination of efficiency and charm. The estate, the farm and the factory are managed at the highest level of efficiency. What cowsheds! What agricultural machines! What crops! What weed control—the fields as spick and span as the cowsheds—all calculated to make a farmer's mouth water. Farm with sufficient capital behind you, farm with sufficient knowledge, farm on a big enough scale and you can't help but make a success of it. I don't doubt that the saw mill, the factory and the cider works are equally efficient. So, too, I dare say, is the school; certainly the school buildings, in which the Fabian Summer School was housed, are models of planned comfort. Every child has its private bedroom with hot and cold laid on.

Dartington Hall itself is beautiful. Here is an old building, restored with perfect taste; hall, church, library, refectory—looking at each of them, one experiences a little thrill of pleasure, a pleasure which familiarity only increases. Pleasure, too, from the quadrangle with its three sides of old stone building and its two or three perfectly sited pines and big plane tree: pleasure above all from the gardens and grounds and the open air theatre set on its smooth grass lawn at the bottom of a basin, whose sides are grass terraces rising all round to a height of some two or three hundred feet. The topmost terrace is surmounted by an impressive statue of a reclining woman by Henry Moore. Nature here is tamed, cut and polished for human uses, “groomed,” as the movies put it, for mankind, affording

a perfect setting for man in a meditative mood. Here you can read, sleep, walk or vegetate as the fit takes you. I have sat for hours on a seat by a herbaceous border, sat on a little withdrawn lawn enclosed by a box hedge, sat in the "gallery" of the theatre, that is, on the highest of the lawn terraces whence is a wide view of the country stretching away to Dartmoor, sat on a memorable afternoon in the quadrangle listening to a pair of musicians practising Beethoven's Piano and Violin Sonata, Opus 96—the first time I heard this charming and meditative work. Half an hour's walk away is the Dart, deep-flowing, kingfisher-haunted, overhung by great trees. There is a place where you can climb down a steep bank to an outcrop of rocks which jut just far enough out over the stream to enable you to dive off their end into deep water. Near Dartington Hall is a pub which is almost unique among pubs in that it serves the purpose for which pubs were originally designed—that of being a gathering-place for the whole community. Here, in addition to a well-stocked bar at which it is possible even in these days to get a glass of any one of half a dozen different kinds of wines or aperitifs—not to speak of some first-rate cider—are facilities for eating. As often as not you would find something hot, cooked for the occasion, but at any time you can buy cold food and eat it at one of the many little tables, products, these, of the Dartington woodwork factory, littered with the daily and weekly papers with which the floor is set. There are darts, skittles and two good billiard tables. After a morning spent agreeably in reading and writing in the grounds I have gone to a lunch hour concert given by a quartet—a group of musicians always seems to be staying at Dartington Hall—repaired to the pub for a glass of sherry, a plate of cold meat and half a pint of cider and then gone down to the river to sleep before taking a bath about half-past three. An admirable way of passing a hot summer's day!

Let me, then, here pay my tribute to Dartington. I

know many people with taste who have not the money to gratify it; I know some who have the money but not the taste to spend it gracefully. Dartington is, in my experience, a unique example of great wealth laid out in a civilised manner, redounding to the credit of its owners by reason of the benefits that it confers upon those who have the good fortune to work for them. Here is neither charity nor patronage, but money laid out with forethought and knowledge in such a way as to refine the senses, develop the tastes, enlarge the understandings of a whole community and so give men and women who otherwise had not known it a vision of what life lived at its best might be.

But what has all this to do with Summer Schools? The answer brings me to my point, for that precisely is how I now spend my day, my old man's day, at the Fabian Summer School, *not* leading walks, *not* playing tennis, *not* dominating discussions, *not* planning entertainments, *not* arranging assignations with all and sundry, but browsing, vegetating and meditating away from the herd; no longer the king pin, but an outsider who makes his impact upon the life of the Summer School only to give an occasional lecture.

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July 30th, 1947

AN UNTAKEN WALK ON DARTMOOR

THE FOREGOING REFLECTIONS received to-day most melancholy exemplification. Wednesday at the Summer School is the weekly day off. There is no morning lecture; lunches are packed and people are expected to take them away and eat them anywhere they please, so long as they don't eat them at the School; thus, the staff gets a rest and the Summer School a break. Some go on a motor coach tour over Dartmoor; others on a steamer trip down the Dart; those who have private cars go off for expeditions by themselves; others subside into a day's shopping at Totnes; some play golf. Pre-eminent among these activities is an organised walk for which people are asked to put down their names early in the week. The party would walk a couple of miles or so to Staverton Station and take the train to Ashburton, whence they would start out on a round walk of some twelve to fourteen miles, getting out on to the moor near Holne and walking for a couple of miles or so along its outlying fringe, bathing in the young Dart and so back to Buckfastleigh, whence they would return by train for the evening meal followed by a lecture. This tended to be the high spot of the lecturing week. It took place in the evening when everybody had had a day off from the School, so that everybody was more or less glad to come back to it, and it took place after dinner, when the atmosphere was a little more festive and relaxed than that which prevailed at the more strictly formal discussions in the morning. As a rule somebody whose name was known to the wider public would be asked to give this Wednesday evening lecture and the topic chosen was of a more general interest- -"The Future of the Government" for example, as compared with the

morning discussion of "The Government's Colonial Policy"—so that workers would attend from the Dartington estate, while a few cars would travel out from Totnes. On a number of recent occasions the giving of the Wednesday evening lecture has fallen to my lot, and I would come back to it, eupeptic and hearty, after a day spent walking on Dartmoor.

But for some years now I have been the instigator of a deviationist walking party. The official walk, I declared, was too dull and unadventurous. It involved too much road walking; it wasn't long enough and it only just touched the moor. Also, I said, too many people went on it and its speed was therefore, too slow. Why not a "man's walk" across Dartmoor itself, taken by a few stalwarts, organised and led by myself? So I set myself to devise such a walk. We took the same train as the others at Staverton, but left it to get out at Buckfastleigh. From the station we walked through the town and out of it on its western side. After a mile or so on the road we turned left into a thick wood, King's Wood, which was threaded by a winding path rising steeply all the way. As we reached the top of the ridge up whose wooded sides we had climbed, we got our first intimation of Dartmoor, a grand view through the trees north and north eastwards over Widecombe, Hamel Down and Hayton Down. After a mile or so along a moorland road we came out on to the moor proper at Cross Furzes where year after year the party stopped to drink a glass of milk; thence due west straight across the moor until we ran down a slope to the Avon which we reached about one. A bathe in the river, occasioning embarrassed jokes about the absence of costumes and the withdrawal of the women to a decent distance—it was diverting, by the way, to notice that what constituted a decent distance varied and on the whole diminished from year to year—and then lunch by the river bank. After lunch came a rough climb up a steep hillside to White Barrows, whence is a great view over the southern moor. Three miles away due south one could

see the hump of Three Barrows, the next landmark on the walk. Those three miles were hard going; there was no path, the heather was deep and much of the ground was boggy with every now and then a deep bog hole into which you might easily sink up to your knees. From Three Barrows there is a great view over the southern edge of the moor across miles of green cultivated country with the green, yellow and red fields showing like a patchwork quilt to the open sea and Plymouth Sound away to the right. On a clear day one could pick out the battleships. Altogether a most heartening and uplifting view, as indeed is any view from wild over cultivated country, or over wild country from cultivated.

From Three Barrows we walked along a disused quarry railway or tramway track past Ugborough Beacon which the more vigorous went out of their way to ascend, while I, already beginning to tire badly though unwilling to show it, excused myself on the plea of the need to take those who were beginning to fail by the shortest and easiest way. We came down on to the road somewhere near Wrangaton Station in time for a drink at the pub before catching the six o'clock train back to Totnes. Here there was a scramble for a bus; if we felt rich, we hired a taxi; more frequently we walked the couple of miles back to Dartington, arriving just in time for dinner. I bathed, changed, had a late, scrappy meal and then gave my lecture, only too conscious of the admiration of those who wondered that a middle-aged—nay, a late middle-aged—man, already thickening to fat, could walk all day across Dartmoor and then lecture to and hold his own in discussion with a critical and quick-witted audience, prior to topping off the day with an hour's dancing.

That is how it used to be. And, apart altogether from the fun of showing off my varied powers, I got immense enjoyment from those versatile days. I loved leading the walk and—for most men are Baedeker-hearted—showing the way and pointing out the not to be missed places.

I loved the feeling of jolly companionship which, as the day wears on, engenders itself on walks among the most improbable persons and knits them into a little community imbued with a temporary collective consciousness. Above all, I loved Dartmoor itself, the great views, the solitude and the wild high places of the moor. Indeed, I should not be making this entry in my diary, an entry pervaded by such manifest nostalgic regret, unless these days had scored themselves with a deep significance upon my consciousness. And then there was the fun of coming back to and mixing once more with the herd. How reproachfully the ex-walkers used to look at me, as I deliberately withdrew myself from the dispersing community consciousness which the day on the moors had developed, and merged myself once more into the generalised Summer School mass. *They* meanwhile were still trying against impossible odds to hold on to the consciousness and breathe the atmosphere of the little closed community that had formed itself out of doors, an atmosphere perceptibly thinning until it evaporated altogether in the light and the chatter and the gaiety of the re-assembled school. But I, having learnt by experience not to drink the cup when the wine is already at the dregs, ruthlessly upturned it, as I hurried with almost indecent haste to re-establish my connections with the mass. . . .

Well, they were great days and they are no more, for to-day I decided for the first time, having been taught by the hard experience of the year before, when I almost went to sleep during my own lecture, that I could no longer both lead the walk and lecture in the evening. I could still do the walk, provided I did not have to lecture, but I could no longer do both. And so I went with the walkers in the morning to Staverton Station, bade them a regretful farewell and then returned to spend just such an old man's day as I have described, reading and writing in the Dartington grounds, listening to a lunch hour concert, meditating, sleeping, bathing, having tea with the Vicar and so back to the School,

charged by my day of meditative solitude with the nervous energy that, in me at least, is necessary for the delivery of a good lecture. Well, it *was* a good lecture.

This contraction of Summer School activity is a good example of the sort of thing that I object to in growing old. It is hard to find oneself relinquishing one's hold on life's activities. And yet, on reflection, worse than the fact that I mind is the fact that I don't mind as much as I expected to do or ought to have done. Of course, I hated missing the walk, but I did not hate it so much as I would once have hated it, had I been prevented, say, by illness. Is that a consolation or an exacerbation of my ageing condition?

August 12th, 1947

CONSOLATIONS (?) OF GROWING OLD. CELEBRITY HUNTERS.
NON-EMANCIPATION FROM WOMEN. BEING LEFT OUT OF
THE "PARTY"

Consolations (?) of Growing Old

THIS RAISES A LARGER question about which I have been pondering, more especially to-day on the evening of my fifty-sixth birthday, but am still unable to answer to my satisfaction. The processes involved in growing old are, to me, of absorbing interest and I am sensitive—many would say, morbidly sensitive, to the signs of age in myself. I watched eagerly for their appearance and can still remember the first occasion of my remarking them—a young man ran down a hillside faster than I; I tried to keep up with him and couldn't; I was thirty-six at the time. There followed a period during which I started to draw attention to the fact that I was growing old, to dwell on it persistently and obtrusively in the hope that if I kept pointing it out myself, nobody would point it for me. Nor did they; on the contrary, my passionate and persistent affirmations evoked, as I hoped and expected, equally persistent denials of what seemed—for though my hair early turned grey, I was still energetic and vigorous and very rarely ill—so palpable a falsehood. When at last the thing began to happen in good earnest, when, in spite of the natural spirit of contradiction provoked by my absurd insistence on my age, people could not help but see that I was, in fact, getting old, I thought of it as an unmixed misfortune.

As I have already explained in an earlier entry, successful living depends, for me, on my ability to keep loneliness and boredom at bay.¹ Against these foes I have conducted throughout my life a continuous and on

¹ pp. 105-107.

the whole successful campaign, a campaign, however, which, if it is to be properly waged, requires a constant expenditure of energy and effort. As energy fails, the campaign is less effective and boredom and loneliness encroach. Besides I enjoyed so inordinately doing the things I did; I really got fun out of the tennis and the hockey and the walking and the riding and the climbing and the dashing about all over the country seeing people and now I began to find that I could not do these various things so vigorously, or so often, or so effectively. Moreover, new people had lost the freshness of novelty, new ideas their exciting tang and books their savour.

One of the things to which I had looked forward when I grew old was emancipation from dependence upon women arising out of my servitude to my senses. On the whole, I suppose, I don't like women, not at any rate as much as I like men. I have found them capricious, self-important, touchy, egotistical and, above all, boring. How they will talk about people and especially about themselves and yourself and about the relations between you. Most of them, indeed, have only these two subjects of conversation, "myself" and "yourself," and a time comes when, like Dr. Johnson, I grow heartily sick of both of them. It is this overpowering interest in people who are of no interest, this dwelling upon and magnification of the infinitesimal differences between Tom and Dick and Harry, that makes women, I think, so boring.

Celebrity Hunters

Since I became celebrated, my dislike has intensified. Women hunt a celebrity; it is always the woman, hardly ever the man, that spots you in the street, the bus or the train. Her eyes lit with a gluttonous curiosity hungrily devour your face. Triumphant over her capture, she nudges her companion, whispers and points so that presently two pairs of eyes are concentrated upon your face, the man's with an interest which he has the

grace to make reasonably shame-faced, the woman's brazen and unabashed, as she greedily gobbles up her luscious personality-morsel. When you are fresh and well, happy and carefree, this sort of thing is all very well. Your vanity is gratified by it, especially if the woman is sexually attractive. In such a case the experiment of staring back produces amusing results. Normally, a pretty girl who is persistently stared at by a man evinces a certain discomfort; she looks down, looks away, looks indignant, bridles, tosses her head. But for the starrer at celebrities, these normal resources of stared-at womanhood are not available, or if resorted to, adopted without justification, for *she*, after all, began it. If she stares at you, then you have a perfect right to stare back at her and to persist in so staring, even if she shows signs of resentment. Two can play at her game and if she doesn't like it, she shouldn't have began it.

It is even more amusing to accost the pretty starrer. . . . She may be made to say that she had thought "you were a gentleman," though why she should have thought so, or what she means by it, is far from clear. . . .

But all this is on the assumption that you are well, fresh and carefree. If you are tired, or rushed, or preoccupied or not feeling well, the emotions aroused by the female recogniser are distressing. Nor am I here alluding to anything so crude as the simple fury evoked by the shock tactics of the woman who asks for your autograph as you are running to catch a train, or rushes gushing to tell you, "Dr. Joad, I think your latest book"—or article or lecture or whatever it may be—"is simply too wonderful." I have in mind the subtler but more disagreeable feeling that one's face is being devoured and one's personality invaded and battered at the very moment when it is drained and vulnerable because drained, and one lacks the energy to put up the barriers behind which it could defend itself, let alone to take the initiative and counter attack. And because, as I have grown older, I am the more often tired and preoccupied, I have on balance

come to dislike the celebrity-hunter and to score up the fact that nine times out of ten she is female as a new black mark against the sex.

I am only here lightly touching on a single item in the many heads of my case against women, dwelling more particularly upon the way in which the accident of my becoming a fairly well-known figure has strengthened it. I would not for a moment have it supposed that I am here treating the subject as it deserves. I content myself, then, with recording as the characteristic feature of women most immediately relevant to my present theme, their boringness. If they are boring, if they talk interminably about themselves, if they tempt you sometimes into opening yourself to them, telling them your thoughts, speaking of your ideals, unfolding your aspirations and ambitions and then dash you with some unforgiveable triviality which shows you that they haven't understood or cared to understand a word of what you are saying, if they are inconsequent, uninformed, self-centred—why put up with them? The remedy, after all, is simple; one cultivates the society of men. Quite so, nothing could be simpler or more agreeable, if it were not for the mosquito of sex.

Non-emancipation from Women

When I was young, the solicitation of sex was like a mosquito buzzing in a room in which one was trying to write; one could not get on with one's work until the mosquito was "swatted." "Swatting the mosquito" meant the society of women and since, for me, prostitutes were from the very first infinitely repellent, the society of women of one's own class. I have put all this as if the needs involved were purely physical, but things were not so simple as that; for, rooted in the physical, the need transcended its origins. Intimacy with the attracting woman had upon me at once a galvanising and a releasing effect. It first stimulated me to display, as the drake shows the bright colours of his head in the mating season

and then, when the purpose of display had been served, released the pent-up mental and spiritual energies of my being. My mind would play its prettiest pranks to attract a woman and then, the body satisfied, I would be carried away on a flood of intellectual energy. Before I would talk big, dream dreams, nourish vaulting ambitions, and see myself as Prime Minister; after I would sit down and do a good spell of solid work, writing my book, getting up my lectures, preparing my speeches or pouring myself out in a flood of articles.

Nor was it only the intellect that was involved. Women served as "precipitates" for the spirit. I was once shown a chemical fluid which appeared limpid and colourless, so that you would say that you were looking at a glass of water. In fact, it was saturated with chemicals in solution. The demonstrator inserted a piece of string and immediately a set of crystal-like substances began to form along its length; the string had acted as a precipitant to the chemicals in solution and caused them to crystallise. It was something of this effect that women had on me. My sense of beauty was sharpened, my energies quickened, my wits brightened, my whole sense of being heightened by the presence of a desired woman whom I had a reasonable hope of possessing.

All this, I dare say, is commonplace enough. I am merely describing the influence that women have habitually exercised upon expressive and articulate young men. What, I think, in my case was unusual was the element of subconscious resentment which accompanied it. For the effects of intercourse, though desirable, were transient, and were achieved only at the price of long spells of stifling boredom, so that it seems to me looking back, as though the outstanding memory I have brought away from the women I have known and loved, is the memory of being bored. I have been so bored that I have invented any and every excuse, even going to the length of sending myself recalling telegrams, in order to get away; so bored, that I have grown capricious

and exacting to the point of deliberately provoking a row, merely in order to provide myself with material to occupy my attention and engage my emotions. How horrid, how utterly and indefensibly horrid I have been to women; what absurd slights I have pretended to have had put upon me; what touchy feelings I have exhibited and taken satisfaction in exhibiting; how I have sulked at some fancied grievance and kept on sulking for days on end, just because I was bored and wanted to endow with interest of any sort and at any cost the relationship that bored me. And yet because women were for me necessary in the rôle of spiritual aperients and intellectual detonators or—if the metaphors be thought impolite—as the necessary shuttles for the weaving of the stuff of my dreams and aspirations, I had no choice but to put up with their company, and, what is more to the point, the company of my own bored and boring self. . . .

And so it is that I had come to look forward to the time when I should be emancipated from the solicitations of desire and from subjugation to the tyrant that lurks in what the Bible calls “my loins.” Well, the time has come, or almost, and my servitude, I find, is as great as ever. For as the physical has diminished, the emotional need for women has grown, until I am now become dependent upon them for the company and comfort that a man cannot give.

There is a profoundly disturbing remark of Bacon’s. “Wives,” he says, “are young Men’s Mistresses; Companions for Middle-age; and old Men’s Nurses.” Well, I suppose, I am drawing near to the nurseling stage and the invalid is obviously even more dependent on his nurse than the young man on his mistress, or the middle-aged man on his companion. Whatever the explanation, the fact remains that now that I have reached the middle fifties—and I only admitted that the thing had happened after it had been forced on me by the experience of several years—I really begin to like women. Now this, for one who had looked forward to his emancipation

from the need for them, has been one of the disillusionments of growing old, or, more precisely, it is one of the consolations of growing old that has failed to materialise.

Being Left Out of the "Party"

Are there any others?

Yes, I think there is one, yet even so I am not sure whether it is more properly to be regarded as a solution or as an exacerbation of my ageing condition, which brings me back to the origin of these reflections, which was that I can't make up my mind whether my discovery that my inability both to lead the walk and to give the lecture did not upset me as much as I had expected it to do, is a reason for gratification or regret. Is it a good thing or a bad that I did not resent missing things as much as I used and ought to resent it?

A day came in the middle fifties when I realised that I did not mind being left out of the party; that is to say, that I *really* didn't mind in contra-distinction from *pretending* not to mind. And with that, too, there came the realisation how, in this matter of being left out of parties, I had all my life been pretending not to mind when I did mind. Continuously throughout my life I have been left out of the team; I have not been invited to tea with the Headmaster; I have not been taken on the reading party; I have not won the scholarship; I have not got the job; I have not been elected; I was not made chairman; nobody has proposed that I should be a delegate or a representative; nobody has asked me to serve on the Board—in a word, I have been left out of the party, and my pride has demanded of me that I should put up the pretence of not minding, put it up not only to other people but also to myself. What a strain it has been, keeping up that pretence of stoical disdain, or light-hearted indifference, of calling sour the grapes that one knew in one's heart to be only too sweet.

And, as I say, there came a moment in the middle fifties when for the first time I realised that I really did

not mind. Some organisation for which I had done good and earnest work wanted a delegate to represent it at a conference in France. Since it was France, I had hoped to be chosen and was, as I believed, greatly looking forward to the trip. I was not chosen and to my astonishment I really did not mind. And therein, I suppose, lies one of the main, perhaps *the* main consolation of age, the consolation that you don't mind as much as you used to mind, when you don't get what you want.

And yet, as I said above, I cannot make up my mind whether this should rightly be regarded as a consolation or an exacerbation of the senile state. Probably an exacerbation for it is difficult, isn't it, quietly to acquiesce in the dimming of the flame of desire? It isn't so much that one doesn't want things as much as one did, as that one doesn't go on wanting them for as *long* as one did. Putting this in another way, I should say that it is not only the body and the brain, but the heart that grows tired and, because tired, incapable of sustaining emotion. It is the incapacity to sustain emotion that accounts for what seems at times the revolting heartlessness of the old. "I am so sorry to hear that your old friend, James, is dead," you say, making conversation as you sit at tea with the old gentleman. He has not heard of James's death and is properly shocked. "What, James dead?" he says. "What you tell me pains me beyond measure. He is my oldest friend; I have known him all my life. What a terrible blow!" And, then, without any pause or sense of transition, testily to his wife, "You *know* I always take two lumps of sugar in my tea." The point is not that the old man's pain on hearing of James's death is not genuine; the point is that it is not sustained. Now whatever the consolation, one would, one thinks, hate to grow like that.

In the second place, it is pretty clear that the failure to mind so much is not a positive thing, the attainment of a tranquil serenity which is comparatively indifferent to the toothaches and pimples of daily experience, but

something negative, a by-product of diminishing vitality. One is, it is obvious, relaxing one's grip on life; one does not mind things so much because one has not so much vitality with which to mind them. Ought one to mind this? Ought one, that is to say, to mind not minding things so much, if, as I surmise, diminished vitality is the cause?

The answer depends, once again, upon how much one happens to be alive. In the proportion to which one is still vital and interested one minds, or ought to mind, not minding missing things so much; in the proportion to which one is not, one doesn't mind not minding missing them. It seems, then, that whether my failure to mind—as I would once have minded—being unable to manage both the walk and the lecture is to be regarded as a consolation or an exacerbation of age, depends upon the tightness of the grip which I still retain upon life. The fact that I began by regarding it as on the whole a consolation means that I am older than I would have been, had I regarded it on the whole as an exacerbation. To put it shortly, whether not minding is a consolation or not, depends upon whether one's life is on balance worth living or not; if on balance not worth living, then not minding is a consolation; if worth living, then an exacerbation.

Now, having read a great deal on the subject of the relative advantages of being young and old and, more particularly, on the compensating advantages of old age, I feel bound to avow that my life is not as much worth living as it used to be not, at least, if *enjoyment* of living is the standard. I used to get more fun out of life than I do now, and I have not made up in added tranquillity or serenity what I have lost in enjoyment. I have *not* learned to set a lower value upon the joys of vigorous exciting activity, or a higher one upon the things of the contemplative mind and spirit; I have not learned to render myself immune from what I called above the toothaches and pimples of experience—in fact, they matter

more than they did—and no amount of high-toned talk about the consolations of not minding missing things so much will make up for what used to be the fun of not missing them at all but having them.

The pleasures of renunciation are at best a second best. One makes the best case one can for them with talk about the consolations of growing old because one knows that a case has to be made. "Sir," says Dr. Johnson, "all the arguments which are brought to represent poverty as no evil, show it to be evidently a great evil. You never find people labouring to convince you that you may live very happily upon a plentiful fortune." Similarly, nobody strives to convince you that it is on the whole a good thing to be young and vigorous. Now, what is true of my experience, is true, as far as I can see, of the great majority of the old who, so far from being tranquil and self-sufficient, are fussy, irritable, teeming with trivial grievances and complaints, and much more incommoded when little things go wrong than are the young.

October 17th, 1947

OXFORD: HOW A CIVILISATION DECLINES. QUESTIONS AT
BALLIOL. WINE-DRINKING. GARDENS OF ST. JOHN'S

(OUTSIDE THE ALLOTTED year, but the occasion impressed and stimulated me, so it must go in, although the diary is officially closed.)

How a Civilisation Declines

To Oxford, to talk to the Labour Club. Why the Labour Club? Because I am still hankering after a political career and can best serve it—or so I like to think—by addressing audiences I understand and can manage, that is to say, not common or garden mixed audiences, still less working-class audiences, but the young and particularly the undergraduate young. Undergraduates are, from the speaker's point of view, the best audiences in the world, young, vivid, eager and intent. Instead of dropping words like stones into a well, you have the sensation of touching off a sensitively controlled spring which gives and responds and is liable at any moment to come back on you in a roar of laughter or a round of applause. (There are other ways of coming back, of course, but, mercifully, I have escaped them.) There are women, not too many of them to sit like puddings and weigh the meeting down with their sponge-like receptiveness, but enough to put the men on their mettle.

I was met at the station by a polite and deferential undergraduate whose manners were as charming as his solicitude was flattering and taken to St. John's. Three quarters of an hour to go before dinner which, excusing myself on the ground that I had to see a friend, I spent resting on the bed, dozing—one can always doze when one wants to at Oxford—and reading *The Newcomes*—its 900 odd pages lasted me all the summer and are still lasting well on into the autumn.

Dinner at the Mitre; no worse than usual but also no better! Conversation with the undergraduates stiff and shy as in the early stages it always is, and made stiffer and shyer by the presence of two women from Somerville—I suppose they have to have them, though the effect is to put the men on their good behaviour so that the talk is blinkered, small and polite. The atmosphere was not improved by the inevitable undergraduate inexperience in the matter of drinks. They don't realise that old chaps like me like a drink or two before the meal *plus* beer or wine with it, or, realising it in theory, they don't know how to order the drinks in such a way as to get them in time, so that the glass of sherry arrives not when it is wanted, to oil the wheels before dinner, but half way through the second course.

Meeting at the Regent's Park College. Never heard of it before but it turned out to be theological and at the back of Pewsey House. The hall held about 500, including 100 or more standing and some 200 were turned away. I was pleased, proud and flattered, though my pride was slightly damped by the obvious surprise of my hosts that I should be such a draw. Gave my customary address on the future of civilisation with a fair slice of labour politics, sweetened by what I hoped was judicious praise of the Labour Government, sandwiched in the middle. I have done the future of civilisation so often that the lecture now partakes of the nature of a performance, fluent, flawless and amusing. But I made a mess as usual of the comparatively unfamiliar political matter. I am not good at praising governments. . . . Applause and a sheaf of questions which the chairman managed with expert skill. Indeed, his management of the whole meeting was a model of quiet competence. He had an agreeable voice, plus an easy manner and great tact and charm. The sort of young man one can still find at Oxford and Cambridge and nowhere else! Will, I should imagine, become a bishop.

Questions at Balliol

Then to Balliol, where I was told a few undergraduates had been invited to meet me. Perhaps I should be asked to say a few words; almost certainly there would be questions. In point of fact, the occasion turned out to be formidable. At least forty men were crowded into an ordinary-sized room, they partook moderately of beer, since there wasn't enough beer for second glasses and some of them, considerably less than half, smoked. After the usual preliminary embarrassment, they began to fire questions at me. How had Oxford changed since my time? What did I think of Oxford women? What did I think of *them*? Why did I think that decorated were more beautiful than purely utility buildings, Gothic cathedrals than twentieth-century factories—this last, inevitably, from an American? Didn't what was beautiful change from age to age? I said, "No," since I considered beauty to be absolute and objective. Oh, I believed in objective beauty, did I—this with an air of contemptuous surprise? Then, how explain the fact that the American didn't like the cathedrals so much as he liked the factories? (I was too polite to tell him.) Was Toynbee's *A Study of History* reliable as history? Didn't it presuppose an unconscious metaphysics, perhaps even an unconscious theology—a Christian theology, wasn't it? If so, was it right to present so biased a work as history? What did I mean by saying that civilisation was declining and what did I mean by civilisation? Was this a decadent age? What, anyway, was decadence?

They were an exceptionally intelligent lot; not only more intelligent than a corresponding group of London students and much more intelligent than a group of middle-aged professional men, but more articulate. They put their points clearly and well; they said on the whole what they meant to say and not something else, and their minds were unusually quick in the intellectual uptake. It was a pleasure to talk to them, so that I was not content to stonewall their questions and parry their

thrusts, or to evade them with jokes and quotations, but was stimulated to do my best to propound and explain my real opinions and to give the reasons for them. Clever and animated as they were, I was sorry for these undergraduates. As I looked round the crowded, dingy room, noted the untidy, shabby clothes, marked the paucity of beer and cigarettes, I could not help contrasting their lot with that of my own generation. When we were at Oxford, our lives were cushioned with money and leisure; they had neither and as a consequence the future was ever present with them. Ever present, too, was the State. We never thought about the State one way or the other, but upon them it pressed in countless ways, apart altogether from the fact that it was defraying out of generous grants the expenses of their university education. "If it were not for the grants," one of them said to me, "most of us wouldn't be here." How, in the circumstances, could they be carefree as we were. How could *they* be expected to put "jerries" on the spikes of the Martyr's memorial, to dress up as policemen and regulate the traffic, or drive a herd of donkeys down the Broad? They were a generation robbed of the larkiness of youth.

Nor were the high jinks of the young the only goods of which as they went through life they would be deprived. Some valuable experiences they would never savour, some sensibilities they would never cultivate. Thus, they would live aesthetically narrower, spiritually more impoverished lives than we had done. All this I tried to explain in attempting to answer the questions about a declining civilisation. What did I mean, they asked, by suggesting that ours was declining? What were the marks of decline and how would one detect them? "That is difficult to answer," I said, "because if you have never known a thing, you don't miss it, or, indeed, know that there is anything to miss."

Wine-drinking

Take wine, for example. A taste in wine is an aesthetic taste, belonging to the same family as a taste in books, a taste for pictures, or a taste in music—albeit a poor relation of the family. It is, therefore, a civilised taste. It gives undoubted pleasure, but pleasure is not the only, perhaps not the most important, element of value in the complex experience which the mind enjoys via the machinery of a cultivated palate, from the drinking of good burgundy or claret. In addition to the pleasure there is the perception of something rare and beautiful, entailing a heightening of sensibility and an enrichment of being. Nor should this occasion surprise. There is no reason—at least, I know of none—why the experience of beauty in physical things should be limited by those sensations which are stimulated through the sense organs of hearing and sight and the neural machinery by means of which their stimulation is conveyed to the brain. But that this total and complex effect of good wine may be experienced, the palate must first be cultivated. Taste in wine comes no more than taste in music or in art by chance or nature; it is a long, sometimes a laborious business to acquire it, and in the course of acquiring it, we have to put up with distastes and disgusts entailed by the ever more frequent rejections of the second rate. It also demands a clean palate, a knowledge of what to eat with and before one drinks, moderation in drinking and certain prohibitions in the matter of smoking.

Above all, it involves constant, continuous and long habituation with wines of all kinds and particularly with those that are good.

These are some of the reasons why a taste in wine is rarely acquired before middle age.

“Now you,” I said, “will in all probability never acquire this taste, for the shortage of good wines is now so great as to make them to all intents and purposes unprocurable. The war introduced a break, the first in

centuries, in the wine-drinking tradition. The pre-war wines are practically used up, the war and post-war wines are too young to be worth drinking and it is doubtful whether many of them will ever be worth drinking. It is, of course, possible that if European civilisation survives, good wines will again be available a dozen years hence, but during those dozen years, you will not have had the chance to acquire the taste for them, since you will be deprived of the opportunity to cultivate a palate. Taste and knowledge in the matter of wine drinking, like taste and knowledge in any other department of human activity or experience can't after all be acquired in the absence of the raw material necessary for practice and training.

"In effect, then," I concluded, "your generation will never savour the pleasures of drinking first-rate wine, as previous generations have savoured it, and you are, therefore, a generation robbed of a valuable experience which has formed part of the content of the civilised life, as the civilised life has hitherto been understood. By reason of the lack your lives will be impoverished. That is an example of what I mean by a declining civilisation."

I reflected further on the concept of a declining civilisation, putting to myself the questions, what forms does a decline in civilisation take, and how are they to be recognised when they show themselves, when on the following morning I breakfasted in Hall.

Undergraduates no longer take their meals in their rooms, but breakfast, lunch and dine in Hall. Tea, however, they still make in their rooms and since they don't like leaving their rations in Hall for fear that somebody might pinch them, they can be seen crossing the Quad before and after every meal, laden with bits of butter, canisters of tea, packets of sugar, even with screws of salt and pepper. They seemed to me to be a little shamefaced about this necessity under which they labour and made jokes when caught in the act. Lunch,

I was told, was usually taken at a British Restaurant, of which there were six in Oxford. You queued up for anything from a quarter to half an hour, snatched your food, sat down with workmen, clerks, shop-keepers, and bus conductors at crowded little tables and in the midst of an appalling din consumed a fairly substantial meal for one and threepence. After breakfast—a bit of haddock, margarine and doubtful marmalade—we walked round St. John's gardens.

Gardens of St. John's

In my time, St. John's, New College and Worcester gardens used to rank as the three most famous college gardens in Oxford. Worcester gardens, I was told, had been let down and, indeed, I had myself during the war seen something of the decline of their loveliness. The public seemed to be all over the place and the station uncomfortably near.

St. John's gardens were still lovely and, as far as I could see, untouched by the times. But the public, I was told, were not allowed to wander at all times freely in the gardens and I myself remembered how often as a school-boy and later as an undergraduate, I had gazed wistfully into these gardens, through the holes in the fence that separated them from Parks road and hated the great iron gates which were never open. Now I appreciated and applauded the wisdom of the jealous curators of this place. They knew—and, I suppose, everybody always has known until the last twenty-five years—that if you allow the public into a beautiful place, especially if it be a place of formal, natural beauty, with smooth lawns, herbaceous borders and rockeries, it will presently cease to be beautiful, for the public will leave their paper and cigarette ends and, when oranges are available, orange peel; they will trample the grass, steal the flowers, and break down the bushes.

Well, who has ever taught them better? It was, I suppose, in the nature of the case that when democracy

went to pay its first call on the country, it should leave its visiting card in the shape of litter. But, whatever the excuse, the fact is undeniable—bring the untutored townsman into contact with natural beauty and he will either ignore it or spoil it. For man is born in original aesthetic as well as in original moral sin, not only are his natural tastes for what is vulgar and bad, but what is beautiful and rare outfaces and discomfits him, prompting him to deface and to despoil it, to prune it and tame it, to put fences round it or cut his name on it or litter it with paper or defecate in it or shout and scream in it and so, leaving by one method or another his mark upon it, to assert himself against it, hoping to get rid of the feeling of inferiority that it engenders in him.

Now, all this, I suppose, has always been known to men in authority and in the Christian centuries was taken for granted. But democracy must deny it, holding as it does that men are naturally good and can be made better by act of Parliament, or—a less extreme version of the same creed—that acts of Parliament engendering changes in the social environment can enable man to actualise the potential good that is his by nature, but has hitherto been denied expression by bad social conditions. Educate us, give us leisure and money, bring us into contact early and often with the good, the beautiful and the true and then, says democracy, we shall automatically love and respect the highest when we see it.

Now, democracy is clamouring at the gates—quite literally at the gates of such places as St. John's gardens. For who can believe that the use of gardens will still be denied to the public fifty years hence, or that, if they are opened to all comers they will retain their present serenity and gracious charm, or that, if they were to remain closed, the College would have sufficient resources to enable it to maintain so much defiantly non-utilitarian beauty?

The gardens, in fact, like the way of life to which they ministered, are an anachronism. Their existence depends

on privilege and their enjoyment on money and leisure. But we are moving into an age which is without privilege, has little money and less leisure. Thus, the gardens of the Oxford Colleges are examples of a rapidly diminishing category of valuable goods. The great country houses are no longer able to keep up their gardens; their owners are too poor. When they have passed into the hands of Institutions, Schools, Mental Hospitals or Hotels, the gardens are used for utilitarian purposes and become wombs for vegetables, or they remain non-utilitarian but are used by too many people to permit of the retention of their charm. For gardens are like women in this, that if they are enjoyed by too many lovers they lose their freshness and individuality. If the gardens pass into the hands of some public authority, they must inevitably be opened to all comers, so that, apart altogether from any physical devastation which they may undergo, their spiritual content will be impoverished until they become as lifeless as a municipal park or as some of the more popular properties of the National Trust. Hence, it is not unplausible to suppose that in fifty years time nowhere in England will there be found gardens like those of St. John's College, untapped reservoirs of aesthetic value and spiritual balm, which breathe peace and serenity upon those who visit them.

Now let us grant, (1) that such places are a source of some of the most valuable experiences that men enjoy; (2) that if they cease to be, the conditions necessary for the enjoyment of those experiences will no longer be satisfied; (3) that these are pre-eminently civilised experiences and civilised enjoyments. (It is not the instinctive pleasure in wild nature, nor the physical pleasure of vigorous exercise, nor the social pleasure of intercourse with many persons that one enjoys in such places; it is the pleasures of a peaceful mind and a tranquil soul, enjoyed in solitude or in the company of a loved friend.) Thus (4) it follows that lives deprived of such experiences will be lives aesthetically and spiritually impoverished by

reason of the lack. If, then, a civilisation which once maintained such places and provided the opportunity for such experiences, fails to maintain the one and so to provide the other, the civilisation may be truly said to have declined by reason of its failure. When it is remembered that even the enjoyment of Nature is for most of us threatened by the impending transformation of the southern English countryside into a single sprawling suburb, studded with preserved beauty spots, inhabited by mummified rustics, we may, I think, safely conclude that the reduction of nature both wild and cultivated will bring about a lowering of the level of man's spiritual life and a narrowing of the range of his aesthetic experience. The instance of the gardens, therefore, exemplifies the same tendency as the instance of the wine.

All this and much more I said as I walked round the gardens in the sunlight of that October morning with two charming and deferential undergraduates who presently attended me to the station, linking it up with the illustration of the wine which I had suggested on the previous night, and using both to give concrete meaning to the phrase, "the decline of a civilisation".

"For me," I concluded, "there is at least one gleam of hope on the horizon and that is afforded by my knowledge that, whatever happens, I shall be dead in the course of Nature within twenty-five years. But that, consolation," I added, "is of course denied to you."

I hope I depressed without boring them; more likely I bored without depressing them.

For my part, I put it on record that I don't remember when I enjoyed a visit to Oxford so much.





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